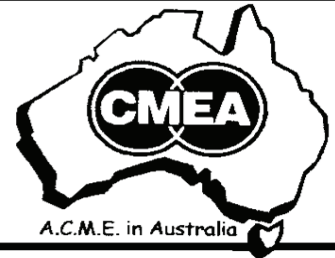


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# COUPLES FOR MARRIAGE ENRICHMENT AUSTRALIA NSW NEWSLETTER

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October 2010

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## What is Happening to Marriage Enrichment? Reflections on its history and the current Australian scene in NSW by Gerlinde Spencer

Marriage Enrichment had its origins in a time when the western world had largely recovered from World War II and was enjoying rising prosperity and peace. This was a time when academics interested in understanding and helping themselves and others emotionally and psychologically had a field day, especially on the University scene in Britain and the U.S. and to a certain extent in Western Europe.

Initially led by experiments in small group work and its impact on the personal lives of the participants, as well as a more systematic approach to developing effective psychotherapy for individuals, the Human Potential Movement got under way from the late 1950's, gaining momentum during the 60's and 70's. Its overall intention was to support people to reach their maximum potential in all areas of their life and thus create a better world.

While the main focus was on the individual, the discoveries in the areas of effective communication and conflict resolution were eventually applied to couple and family relationships. This was the context in which marriage counselling was developed as a service supported by the British and later the Australian Government, following far reaching changes in the law relating to marriage, family and divorce in the 1960's and 70's.

One of the prime movers in the marriage counselling movement in England was Dr. David Mace who became the first Director of the nation-wide Marriage Guidance Council of Great Britain. He was brought to Australia by Sir Garfield Barwick to advise the Federal Government in setting up Marriage Guidance Organisations (as they were called then) in this country.

It is hard to imagine the huge changes that have taken place in how people understood themselves and in how they related to each other, from the 1950's to the present day. To illustrate:- First and even second World War veterans had no help in dealing with the trauma they witnessed and personally experienced at the front. Feelings were not understood and valued, so the best way to deal with them was to ignore what you could and not to raise the memories again by talking about them. Tough times and the loss of loved ones were dealt with in the same way.

We now know that this left many people with a legacy of dysfunction in family relationships which has come down the generations since. In general feelings were distrusted, even feared and high value placed on a "stiff upper lip".



**With the suppression of negative feelings, experience and expression of positive feelings was also greatly diminished, impoverishing all relationships.**

The good news that came out of the Human Potential Movement was that **given the chance people could overcome their limitations and lead a more fulfilling life.** To do this they needed to recognise that feelings are a vital part of people's functioning. It is the feeling reactions that power our responses and leave us more fully alive - to joy and pain. Furthermore, while the mind is important, feelings can be understood and managed so that they need not create the chaos people feared.

These days the majority of people in Australia know this and take it for granted. What they do not necessarily know is how to make this knowledge work for them in their relationships. **In other words, learning how to manage conflict and the inevitable arousal of strong feelings during the conflict is something we need to learn if we want maintain and deepen close relationships.**

*Continued Page 6*

## From the editors

*Jan writes...*

*It is sometimes really important to take a good look at where we have come from, in order to be better able to understand where we are! .....and perhaps even to understand where we want/need to go!*

*This is partly what I see Gerlinde inviting us to do in her leading article and I think it may well be a good time for CMEA to do just that. As Gerlinde shows, ME and CMEA were born out of a conjunction of need, new knowledge and new human openness. Has that unique climate so changed that CMEA needs to reinvent itself to be able to continue to market itself and continue to contribute to the health of marriages in Australia?*

*Barry Davis, on the other hand, writes about his and Paula's experience with a group of Ugandan bishops and their wives experiencing, probably for the first time, the risks and wonders of sharing some their real selves instead of their personal masks. Most CMEA members know something of that joy and some of Barry and Paula's also. These real encounters are of course what make marriage really work. It is interesting to reflect that the sort of thing that Barry and Paula were doing with these couples in Uganda this year, is in part, a current expression of the Human Potential Movement of the 50's and 60's which Gerlinde writes about. It is also the beginning of the process Mark Munger talks about in the following article.*

*In Mark's article on 'Marriage as a Mirror' we are confronted with the demanding realization that marriage is in fact a challenging opportunity to realize our potential as men and women. One of the most interesting theories of mate selection is that we unconsciously choose partners who will challenge us to complete our personal growth into whole, mature, developed human beings. (Incidentally, this model raises the spectre that some of those who divorce are actually denying themselves the opportunity of that growth.) If on the other hand, we are to rise to the challenge of personal growth and change which marriage offers, we are going to need a bunch of skills and attitudes which most of us do not have when we get married. Which of course is where Marriage Education and Marriage Enrichment are needed.*

*The difficulty is that while the requisite skills and attitudes are fairly easily intellectually grasped, (see the communication courses run in most businesses and government departments!) actually implementing them is much more difficult as we all know. It reminds me of my intellectual knowledge of how to apply varnish to produce a mirror like finish but I cannot do it like my cousin who is a professional trained in England. He does it perfectly every time with apparently almost no effort. All of which takes us back to the continuing need for the workshop/laboratory/training nature of ME. It is not easy to master the skills of reflective listening or to implement the well understood processes of effective conflict resolution. Most of us know that intimacy is born out of vulnerability and openness and most us will say that we trust our partners but it requires courage and practice to create and maintain a culture of intimacy in our marriages. It may also require the support of other like minded people. These are the very conditions which ME provides and there appear to be very few alternatives available.*

*Gerlinde & Jan*

## Marriage is a Mirror

(Mark Gungor, a widely sought speaker on marriage and family in the US. Each year thousands of couples attend his Laugh your Way to a Better Marriage Seminars. Visit [www.laughyourway.com](http://www.laughyourway.com))

**Ever walk past a mirror and are shocked and mortified by what you see?** Your hair standing up in a weird way, your slip showing, your fly open, egg stuck in your teeth? Mirrors can be life savers. Had it not been for that mirror, you may have gone the entire day looking ridiculous.

Marriage is a mirror. By living closely with another human being, you state to get a picture of what you really look like. This is why marriage is so effective at making people's lives more rich and productive - if they adjust to the needed changes.

Unfortunately many expect marriage to be something that makes them look better, not something that reveals where they don't look so good. Additionally, rather than see where we need to change, we opt to project our own negative images on our spouses and point out where they need to change: She is irritating....he is such a lazy slob....I don't want to act this way but she brings out the worst in me. In the Bible Adam played the blame game like this: "That woman you put here with me - she gave me some fruit from the tree and I ate it."

If we believe our spouse is present in the marriage to make us look better, rather than being a mirror to help us see who we really are, we will think our marriage is inadequate whenever our faults are revealed. Like the witch in "Snow White" who became angry at the mirror for not telling her what she wanted to hear, we criticise the mirror-our spouse-in the marriage. We end up communicating to him or her: This marriage isn't good. You're doing something wrong. We need to get this fixed.

How do you see your marriage now? Is it precious to you? Do you honour, appreciate and place worth on your marriage as it is? If your view of marriage is fundamentally flawed all the energies and strategies you are using (thinking your marriage will be better if we just do this or change that) will end in failure.

Unless you honour your marriage union first - without conditions - your tactics will come across as manipulative strategies to get your spouse to do what you want. This smacks of duplicity and insincerity. You must work on your marriage because you believe it is valuable, not because you are trying to make it valuable. Quick-fix manipulations do not a good marriage make. (!)



Mark Gungor

## BISHOPS AND THEIR WIVES LEARNING TO PLAY

(Anglican Bishops Retreat Uganda)

By Barry Davis

The Bishops and their wives sat in rows in a cavernous conference hall. Some Bishops were at the marriage conference without their wives which added an interesting dimension to the concept of enrichment. All were hard working men and women facing overwhelming physical, psychological, and above all spiritual demands on their lives and marriages. My impression was that the office took on a life of its own and was ravenous in consuming the time and relationship of these African brothers and sisters.

Some of the conversations indicated that a few of the men had been trapped by their image of the position and wives were struggling with their residual irrelevance. The Archbishop reminded his conclave that after the office of Bishop came retirement and the enduring relationship that had started in teen years, continued to this day and more importantly would continue into the future. My impression was that many of the wives were not convinced that their men fully grasped the import of these wise words.

Our session was "Connecting in Sexuality", a subject that is very private in Ugandan society. Henry, the Archbishop, had indicated earlier that this subject should be handled with "appropriate boundaries". We began by providing a Biblical framework for sex as being a pathway to intimacy, much more than a physical act. As the couples were "checking in" with each other, Paula and I discussed the way forward.

Paula came up with an "inspired" suggestion that we do the exercise where numbers one to ten are placed on the floor and at one end the word 'play' and the other end the word 'work'. Participants were then required to stand where they saw themselves on the continuum. We left plenty of room at the 'work' end and were not surprised by the groupings. There were a few men in the 'play' sector but no women and the rest were grouped from midway to the 'work' end.

Participants were then required to stand where they saw themselves on the continuum. We left plenty of room at the 'work' end and were not surprised by the groupings. There were a few men in the 'play' sector but no women and the rest were grouped from midway to the 'work' end.

Paula began to process the group starting with the 'workers'. They explained how at an early age the work ethic had been drilled into them and of the heavy burden of responsibility. Statements such as, "No work, no food"; "Who else will look after my children?"; "How will they be educated...." flowed from their frowning faces. Paula then asked what the 'workers' thought of the 'players' and one woman whose husband was a 'player' began to vent her opinion.

She did this in a playful, humorous way because of her obvious love and the group began to enter into the interchange with suggestions and explosive laughter as the couple began to ease into their new roles as entertainers. After one interchange the Bishop husband held up his hand and demanded the right to respond. This brought the group undone and interjections, suggestions, laughter and more laughter flowed back and forth between the 'players' and 'workers'. These hard working men and women were playing and the game continued for another thirty minutes!

The 'work/play' exercise was the catalyst that freed up conversations for those couples who were present to work on their relationships. The conference grounds were beautiful and to see couples sitting together, talking earnestly under the flame trees and the curious gaze of the monkeys was a moment of satisfaction for us.

## Marriage Enrichment Exercise

### FUN AND PLAY

*On the premise that "All work and no play" makes for a dull marriage, we invite you to try the following exercise and hope that the "work" involved in doing this exercise will result in more "Fun and Play" to liven up your marriage!*

For me "Fun and Play" is.....

I think "Fun and Play" for you is.....

Some things I would like us to do to have more 'Fun and Play' are.....

1. Spontaneous (e.g. hugs, tickles, making love during the day, going out for a quick picnic meal)
2. Planned (e.g. going out together or with friends, a weekend away, a fun holiday)

Share your lists and agree on what you will try to put into practice in the next month/6 months/year. Write your list down and review at the end of the agreed time (sounds like more work, but without that some of us are not going to get there!). Here's hoping you'll have a good time.

### What is CMEA?

*Couples for Marriage Enrichment Australia* is an organisation which exists to enhance and enrich the marital relationship between a man and a woman. CMEA officially began in 1980 and has members throughout Australia. Activities include weekend marriage enrichment retreats, shorter seminars and local support groups, training of marriage enrichment leader couples and the publication of regular newsletters. Some of these events are sponsored by community groups and churches.

*The Newsletter* uses material from a wide range of resources on marriage. The opinions expressed in any article, report or exercise do not necessarily reflect the views of all members of CMEA.

## What is Happening to Marriage Enrichment?

Reflections on its history and the current Australian scene in NSW

by Gerlinde Spencer Continued

Suppression of feelings can get us into trouble in our relationships just as effectively as unbridled expression. Being real when we disagree needs wise handling at the time when we come up against the fact that our partner is different to us. But, to quote David Mace, **discovering and dealing with our differences gets us in touch with the growing edges of our relationship and leads to personal and marital "growth"**.

When Ian and I trained as Marriage Enrichment Leaders in 1978 almost the first exercise at a retreat, following the initial orientation and group building, was to ask participants to write out a list of feelings they were aware of "right now" and to share these with their partner. For some men, in particular, that was quite a difficult task as their awareness had been damped down by their upbringing. Forty two years later we no longer need this "starter".

When David and Vera retired from their work for the British Marriage Guidance Council and made their home in the U.S.A. it was natural for them to be interested in helping couples improve their relationships and thus avoid trouble further down the track. As David said, building a fence at the top of the cliff was far better than providing an ambulance at the bottom.

**As the effectiveness of getting people together in groups for learning new skills and for self-discovery had become an accepted norm in the community, the Mace's expertise in helping couples to make the most of their marriages helped the newly formed Marriage Enrichment movement to flourish.** The Association of Couples in Marriage Enrichment (ACME) was born in the U.S and later assisted the fledgling group of Leader Couples, trained by the Maces in Australia, to form CMEA in 1980.

Along with other community groups sponsored by the Mental Health Association (who offered an excellent program of group leader training in NSW) and the Department of Health in a number of the States at that time, Marriage Education pre and post wedding also attracted an increasing number of people. The latter programs were in the main promoted by the marriage counselling agencies and were given some low level funding from the Federal Government who recognised their preventive potential.

CMEA trained and supplied leader couples for a number of the funded agencies some of which were associated with the mainstream churches and generally promoted the concepts and goals of marriage enrichment. Chapters were formed in QLD, NSW, Tasmania, South Australia and Western Australia.

It should be said here that Marriage Encounter, started by Father Calvo in Spain three months before Marriage Enrichment was launched by the Mace's in the US, also flourished in the 80's and 90's in Australia and elsewhere. Marriage Encounter was adopted by the Catholic Church and also promoted by Anglican Marriage Encounter.

During this stage of development in Australia the fact that the majority of CMEA leader couples were active church members led to some of the main marriage enrichment activity spreading along denominational lines in some of the states. This was helpful but also a problem, in that the wider community needed what marriage enrichment had to offer and couples outside the church found it difficult to join a group organised through a local church.

On the other hand, the fact that CMEA is a non sectarian organisation was hard to get across and sometimes put church leaders off-side. It also meant that when denominational support ceased, largely because a particular denomination developed other priorities for its ministry, CMEA in two of the states was in trouble and eventually ceased to operate.

To get back to changes in perceived need in Australian society over time, the Human Potential Movement did its job so well that without the average Australian being aware of it, societal norms changed massively over the past forty years.

One of the outcomes of greater self awareness and self respect promoted by the Human Potential Movement, in addition to the increased status of women and changes in Family Law, was an increase in separation and divorce. Men and women in unhappy, sometimes violent relationships no longer had to stay in the marriage. There were other options. At the same time expectations of marriage had risen and were increasingly idealistic, rather than realistic resulting in a continuing high divorce rate. Clearly many marriages are in trouble in the present day and could be greatly helped by Marriage Education and Enrichment.

## What is Happening to Marriage Enrichment?

### Reflections on its history and the current Australian scene in NSW

by Gerlinde Spencer Continued

**Ironically pressure on the couple relationship was made worse by another change in our society. Expectations of "wealth" in the sense of property and goods had increased over time, resulting in long working hours for one or both partners to pay for their financial commitments.** These days, couples in the Christian community seeking to balance the demands of an active church, their children and wider family on top of work are largely focused outside their relationship, taking its stability for granted. Something as optional as marriage enrichment has become a luxury few believe they can afford and most think they do not need. Many couples in the secular community, facing the same overload in general, do not know that such a resource exists.

The fact is that groups for "growth" in the general community are no longer in vogue. The only survivors of small community groups seem to be groups for people battling addictions or needing support from others dealing with similar life situations, e.g. Carers' Support Groups, Cancer Support and the like.

All the above contributes to the situation we are in at present. Marriage Enrichment today faces a different challenge, a different climate but the need is still the same - at the very least providing the fence at the top of the cliff, but more than that - promoting the attitudes and skills that are needed for good relating and a safe environment to practice these skills. It is then that couples can enter into greater joy and satisfaction in their marriage.

**The trend over recent years in NSW has been for couples who do attend marriage enrichment events to favour Conferences rather than a longer retreat in a small group.** Conferences are more exciting, with key-note speakers, workshops and a fun night. The smaller workshop groups during the conference cover a range of topics around the conference theme. They provide stimulus but little processing time for the couple and very little sharing in the group. This makes a workshop format less threatening and therefore more attractive for some.

**What it does not provide is time for skills practice and a more in depth exploration of the relationship in private and in the group.** In fact the very basics which distinguish marriage enrichment Mace Style from other more education based events. So far, offering weekend or one day retreats as a follow up to a successful conference has not worked,

despite the enthusiasm of the participants and the constant complaint that there was too little time allowed for individual reflection and dialogue in the sessions.

One thing some of our leader couples in NSW have done successfully over the past almost twenty years is to take marriage enrichment to Christian groups in South Africa, India, Thailand and, more recently, in Uganda, Kenya and the Solomons.\* These have been important ventures and have succeeded in starting ongoing marriage enrichment groups in a number of places. While the going is tough for the leader couple in communities so different to ours, the results are fantastic, as you will have read in a number of our newsletters. **Encouraging as this is we need to discover ways of "doing" and promoting marriage enrichment more effectively on the home front.**

Conferences are valuable, especially for couples who have previous marriage enrichment experience, but they are no substitute for the skills training and deeper sharing possible in a small group over a weekend. **Our world is addicted to the "quick fix" - it takes time to grow a relationship and a growing relationship last over time! Somehow we need to persuade couples to invest that time to enrich the most important human relationship in their life.**

So the question for us is - "What can we in CMEA NSW do at this time to share with other couples what we value and what could make a big difference in their life?"

*(If you have some ideas, - crazy or not - email them to the editors or any member of the NSW Committee.)*



\* Apologies if we missed out a country.

## NSW & ACT Leader Couple News

### Open Retreats — seeking an expression of interest from leader couples

As we mentioned in the last newsletter the CMEA committee is planning to organise 2 non-residential ME retreats in Sydney each year. Noeline and I indicated that we would finalise and circulate a date for the first of these for the second half of this year.

We weren't able to set up a date for this year but we have identified two possible dates for next year and tentative bookings have been placed on the venue to ensure its availability for the dates concerned.

**The dates are: 11-13 March 2011  
19-21 August 2011**

Just to recap on the proposed concept, these are non-residential retreats that would be run at the Interrelate centre in Bella Vista in Sydney's northwest (in close proximity to the M7/M2).

**This is not meant to replace but rather supplement retreats already being organised by individual leader couples or groups.** It enables couples who want to attend a retreat but for which there are no experiences planned in their area, the opportunity to do so and also to provide opportunities for leader couples who have been trained, and are looking to build their experience, to co lead a retreat with another leader couple or lead a retreat themselves.

Hotel accommodation is within walking distance of the venue so as well as metropolitan couples travelling to and from the venue each day it may be of interest for country couples that don't have access to a marriage enrichment retreat in their region.

**Noeline and I would like to hear from leader couples that are interested in leading or co-leading one of these retreats to further progress the planning with the goal of advertising the dates in the December newsletter and on the CMEA website. We will also be contacting you by email to provide more details and gauge interest.**

### **Just a reminder of the following:**

**Please let Rob Corner have dates for your events to enter on the website calendar as soon as they are confirmed! And don't forget to give at least two week's notice to the Spencers when you order your retreat folders or have a request for Newsletters and brochures for non standard events.**

### **Leader Couple Coordinators:**

Noeline and Paul Drayton 02 96293324



## Membership Application/Renewal

*Membership is due on the 1st July each year*

*Please enrol/renew us as a Member couple.*

- We'd like a one year membership at \$30*
- We'd prefer a two year membership at \$50*
- We'd also like to make a donation of \$.....*

Names of Husband and Wife (please print)

.....

Address.....

.....

Post Code ..... Telephone .....

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

*For Bankcard payment please complete the following:*

Card Number \_ \_ \_ \_ \_

Name on Card .....

Expiry Date ..... Card Security Code \_ \_ \_

Amount .....

Signature .....

*Please send to:*

The Treasurer Couple  
CMEA NSW  
3 Rock Lilly Close  
Worrigeo NSW 2540

*Thankyou for supporting the work of CMEA*



# CMEA NEW SOUTH WALES & ACT UPDATE

## Calendar of Events 2010

For the latest dates and details check out [www.bettermarriages.org.au](http://www.bettermarriages.org.au) or phone the Retreat Contact Couple, Noeline and Paul Drayton on 02 96293324.

October

29-31 Refresher & Enrichment Weekend  
"Rivendell" near Hall NSW (open)  
Gary & Jennifer Strachan  
(02) 6230 2570

November 13

### CMEA NSW AFTERNOON WORKSHOP & AGM

You are also invited to join us for dinner at a local restaurant following the AGM

**WHERE:** St Luke's Anglican Church  
Cnr the Kingsway and  
Jacksons Avenue, Miranda

**WHEN:** Saturday, 13 November 2010

**Workshop:** 2.30-5.30, **AGM:** 5.30 pm

**Dinner:** 6.00 pm

**WORKSHOP:** "Marriage Enrichment in Africa"

followed by a panel and discussion on  
"Where to in the future for Marriage Enrichment in NSW and Australia"

See back page for further details

### other Courses led by CMEA Leaders

#### Marriage Education

(pre-wedding, closed)  
All Saints Hunter's Hill, Derek & Ellen Yule  
November 7-8

*Are you interested in more information?*

*Please contact any member of the Committee for further details or enquiries regarding any of these listed events.*

*We also would welcome enquiries about organising an event and using CMEA accredited leaders.*

## PEOPLE TO CONTACT

### NSW COMMITTEE 2009-2010

#### Chaircouple

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#### Secretary couple

Maggie and Ron De Rooy	(02) 4271 5320
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#### Treasurer & Membership

Linda and Rob Corner	(02)4422 1349
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#### Leader Co-ordinator Couple

Noeline and Paul Drayton	(02) 9629 3324
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#### Committee Couples

Grace and Stephen Mok	02 9980 8055
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#### Newsletter Production Assistance:

Noeline and Paul Drayton	E-mail—pdrayton@tpg.com.au or pandndrayton@bigpond.com
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## CMEA NSW

### AFTERNOON WORKSHOP & AGM

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**WHERE:** St Luke's Anglican Church  
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**WHEN:** Saturday, 13 November 2010  
Workshop: 2.30-5.30, AGM:5.30 pm Dinner: 6.00 pm

**WORKSHOP:** "Marriage Enrichment in Africa"

Barry and Paula Davis, will provide insights into their recent experiences in taking Marriage enrichment to Uganda. This will be followed by a panel and discussion on "Where to in the future for Marriage Enrichment in NSW and Australia"

If you wish to go on to dinner with us after the AGM please RSVP by 7 November 2010 to [cmea@bettermarriages.com.au](mailto:cmea@bettermarriages.com.au).

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## CMEA NSW NEWSLETTER

October 2010

Return Address: 3 Rock Lilly Close Worrigee NSW 2540

*Inside this Issue: What is Happening to Marriage Enrichment?; Marriage is a Mirror; Bishops and their wives learning to play; Couple Exercise; News on CMEA events: and more.*