

REPORT ON DISCUSSION GROUP ON "SIMPLER LIFESTYLE." AUSTRALIAN CHURCH WOMEN  
NEW SOUTH WALES STATE UNIT.

The five weeks sessions took a look at the book "Living in Australia" by Stuart Reid.

What does it mean to live in Australia in 1978? In particular what does it mean for the Australian Christian to live faith-fully in 1978.

As the age range was wide, incorporating University age young people, to grandmothers, a wide range of views was expressed. The older ones, more conservative, had felt they had lived through a depression, and a major war, and not grown up in affluence, perhaps they deserved a little comfort as they had worked hard to get what they had! Perhaps this report reflects more the ~~thinki~~-thinking of the more radical younger ones, - who grew up in a different era, - have seen parents who have wanted the best for them, - even sacrificed to give them the best! Perhaps each one saw things differently depending on her age in 1978! This produced more provocative thinking than if it had been all a similar age group.

In the introduction to the book it tells us "One thing is clear, it means more than just coping with, adjusting to, and going along with our present society. Faithful discipleship is a radical way of life, It is a process of radical evaluation, and in that process it will be the Gospel which provides the standard, it is a process of decision making, and it is a process of action and taking responsibility. There are no prescriptions for the outcome, each has to attend to her own destiny. Our discipleship will not be tested in the known, but when we take the step into the unknown. We are not alone, but in the company of the faithful, with Christ and in the power of the Holy Spirit."

Perhaps some of the thinking could be summed up. The group varying in Nos. sometimes only small, but up to 12 people, looked at "The Person in Australia" and "The Australian Social System."

We are failing society if we don't provide some alternative for people to the poker machine, - what a waste when people work hard to earn the money. Also there are two income couples with the wife working who are very comfortable, and just looking for things on which to spend money. Clubs can provide a meeting place, but perhaps they could have a more educational background. But then people are disinclined if they feel they have to study, - if 'learning for leisure' programmes are presented. If they haven't had a higher education they feel they couldn't cope. There is pressure on these people, especially when their children have achieved more-- but when it reaches a stage where parents are as well educated as their children it will level out. But we need to keep on learning, not just stagnate, not just pushing the children to do what parents haven't done.

The Education System was under attack--requiring young people to produce the material the lecturers want, the scheme was intended to open minds, but it is not teaching numeracy and literacy, but although the system was good in concept, when it takes four years to implement, it becomes out of date. Also not all teachers are motivated to teach for the right reasons.

Perhaps it would be better for young people to leave school, and go into the work force, before deciding to do higher education, rather than go from course to course, at the Government's expense, not knowing what they really want to do. Some find it difficult to get a job, - some find it devastating when rejected from work--some will only take the job they have been trained to do, - and those on social service benefits are not encouraged to do anything, and this is bad for morale.

The Church was under attack, - young people are looking for something that is honest, they see the church, and so often it is hypocritical, beautiful buildings, and expensive cars out the front, and people all dressed up, and they reject that! There was a whole generation that felt rejected as the long haired generation, when the 'church' reacted badly to them, so between the ages of 24 and 30 there are fewer people in the church. The young ones are there again, and the church is responding better to them. But many of them are interested in community houses, and a different lifestyle to what we have known, - 'a simpler lifestyle.' Young people are questioning why their parents have what they consider luxuries, because they know that because of our affluence, and people's 'wants being more than their needs', people in other countries are starving. The Christian Family is not showing clear guide lines to the community, and we see in other countries the church is growing, in poorer

countries, where total dependence is on God for existence. We need to set up alternative lifestyles, communities and sharing,- and extended families, where grandparents live with families,- not in retirement villages, where all of older people are together,- although many are happy in this situation. Older people have to be patient and listen to the younger ones. We can't force our standards on society, but the world must see by our lives our Christian values.

We looked at the chapter "Discipleship in Australia." We took a look at some bible readings, and in the light of these we thought of our society.

It was thought that tagged on top of our work situation is the 'dollar sign'. What motivates people? Are we pushing young people to go through the system to get a good job and earn a lot of money, to buy all the personal comforts. We read about the rich young ruler,- but are we pushing children through a system and saying, 'study hard, do well, get a degree, because that way you are going to earn a lot of money,- and that's the all important thing.' Is this the success symbol,- the bigger brighter better syndrome? We are being trained to be consumers, and materialistic, we have a push button consumer society. We must educate, but children are being taught to get at the other person's expense, there is a subtle consumerism attitude, especially by television advertising.

We need some better solution to the system, we are just marking time,- and we haven't time! It was felt Christians can't be capitalists, based on exploiting people, to make profits. People in China are not starving now, under the communist system. But the problem with the word 'socialism' is that it has communist connotations, we need something else. We have freedom but it brings tremendous responsibility,- it comes at a price. Then how do we change society? Revolution doesn't work, the only way is for a brick by brick rebuilding, so we have to change ourselves, and the few people around us. The values we live by must be the values of scripture. Why change our lifestyle? Jesus said "give up everything and follow me." Christians should try to change the economic situation, our job is to look after the creation, and not exploit it, but use it responsibly. There is an information gap, and most Christians don't realise what they are doing, but once we are informed then we are wrong if we don't act. We have to aim at a Simpler Lifestyle. It is a complex subject, but if lots of people do it in a small way, it will add up to a big way. The church needs to stand up and 'say' and 'do' things,- and people will see. We have to reevaluate everything in the light of the Bible.

We also looked at the chapters "Taking Responsibility" and "Contracting Together".

It was said that we can't be afraid of offending, strike the sparks, rock the boat a bit, stir one person's grey matter, thinking it through, it won't fall on empty ground. We think we are only one very insignificant human being, what can be done? Everybody counts, and we must do the things God wants us to do and He will find ~~find~~ us the hours and the minutes,- and the wherewithal. Amazing things happen if we draw on that power,- the church is not taking risks, we have the security bug that was born of the depression,- but nobody is secure in their jobs anymore. The Christian Church's job is to get in and work something out, instead of sitting around in its comfortable pews. It is not done to talk politics, but when there is an election the church should tell the politicians what we believe. Our major role should be to make people aware, we need to present facts,- show films,- because things out of sight are out of mind. Of course many will say "I don't want to listen!"

Some people go on trips, they are educational, and an eye opener, but sometimes they don't see things, they stay at comfortable motels, but we need to go and learn with the people of other places. Some people go with closed minds, and for the wrong reasons, perhaps to keep up with the Jones, and because everyone is doing it.

Time is the most valuable thing we have, and we don't know how much time we have left. We think in terms of money, but if we give the time the money will come. We will be pulled up if we are on the wrong track, but we have to do something ourselves, it begins with us in a small way to live a 'SIMPLER LIFESTYLE' and accept a little bit less, and take a look at our quality of life.

Following the same 'Theme' another series was held on "Discipleship Studies" by Dr. Athol Gill, and in-depth look at St. Mark's gospel, under the headings 'Call to Discipleship', 'The Cost', 'Possessions', 'Community', and 'Mission.' These were very thought provoking sessions, and hopefully others will be stimulated to think and act.

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REPORT ON DISCUSSION GROUP APRIL-MAY 1978. TOPIC "DISCIPLESHIP."

Studies guided by the booklet of Dr. Athol Gill for the Australian Council of Churches.

Nine women, mainly from the Fellowship of Chatswood-Willoughby Church Women, participated in the studies, held at night for one and a half hours weekly for five weeks.

It was discovered that an ecumenical discussion group could proceed without any difficulty with agreement as to what discipleship meant, or to what the response meant. The same commitment went through all, and was refreshed considerably on a common meeting ground. It was suggested to hold another series after a suitable break in time.

Dr. Gill's book was not easy reading, but it was worthwhile. He provided valuable background detail and his constant reiteration of the basis of discipleship, - costly grace - highlighted the core value of the studies.

The CALL to discipleship, when taken up in a miracle of grace - there is a radical nature of response - requiring "death unto self" - participating in community life, and being responsible for Jesus' Mission.

The COST of the path to Glory with Christ is the way of the Cross with Him - the renunciation of privilege, a complete reversal of values, - Discipleship is an inverted pyramid.

Possessions must never enslave the disciple - he has to live but not lavish himself, not make money a god - selfish and unnecessary things must go.

Community is served by sharing possessions and caring for others - there is no end to forgiveness - pagans are converted by seeing the concern, Christians show.

Mission goes out to all, those who reject it are in a perilous position. God is more tolerant of the wickedness of Sodom and Gamorrah. Peace of mind is given to those who respond to mission, and they radiate commitment all the time. Christ directed his mission to the lowly, the blind, the oppressed, the despised, rejected and abused, and the church displays the extent to which it is involved in the mission of liberation or salvation of the oppressed.

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