

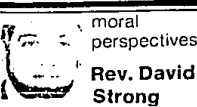
Good family life takes hard work, symbols

MY NEPHEW recently visited our home. He told us about his trip to Sweden at the time of his mother's funeral and how he experienced his extended family there. He found his Swedish relatives very involved as families. They helped one another getting jobs. They shared and even traded vacation houses. They visited each other frequently, though several lived at a distance. The larger family was their support network. During the same week I listened to a father in our community describe the extent to which he goes to spend some time with his teenage son and daughter. "They no longer want to do anything with the family," he said. This conversation reminded me of the description another parent made of a son who comes into the house about dinner time and eats while standing at the kitchen counter. Then he leaves.

Consilio on bias panel

Barbara A. Consilio, administrator for Oakland County Probate Court, was recently appointed by the Michigan Supreme Court to a 10-member task force on racial bias in Michigan courts. The task force will recommend changes in court rules and procedures to assure equal treatment.

The Citizens' Commission found, in a statewide public opinion survey, that one-third of Michigan residents believe blacks and women are not treated as well as whites and men.



Rev. David Strong

THE FAMILY in America is in crisis. Little thought is given to how the desire for freedom destroys the family network. Youth want freedom and mobility. How can they see what values are held alive through the family?

According to an opinion survey conducted by the Wall Street Journal, the 18- to 29-year-olds state that their no. 1 fear is the declining quality of education. The first two priorities in all who were polled were "being a good parent" and "a happy marriage."

I fear many will grow up today wanting a good family life but not

knowing how to make it a reality. Until people grapple with the contrary notions of freedom and loyalty to a family covenant, we will continue to have the dream of a stable family and a reality that is quite the opposite.

A **CONVENANT** understanding of the family means that no matter what happens or what we want to do, we will still function as a family.

Symbols and expressions of this covenant need to be kept. Our symbols have been eating together, no matter what happens and with few exceptions, and talking out issues. Rarely will I accept a telephone call when we are eating as a family. This is our time.

I remember one of our teenage neighbor boys. At a quarter to six at night, he would actually rush out of our house after a visit and run to his home. His family said to him that if you do not get home in time for dinner, you do not eat. You will eat nothing all night.

For a hungry, growing boy this was a powerful motivation to be there when the family ate together.

In other ways he was afforded a great deal of freedom. At certain times the family came first and he had to participate or face the consequences. When out-of-town relatives came, he was to be there for a time to relate to them. I still think of this family as one of the best examples of a healthy, strong family.

AMERICANS STILL dream of a good family life, but too often we are unwilling to pay the price. The price is not only love and trust.

The price is paying attention to those things which make the family real. A family is no different than a marriage. We must plan time to do significant things together. We must make demands upon one another. This may require that we adjust our life so that we may come to the dinner table together.

We must make the family a unit which provides advantages and opportunities to its members.

No longer is the family a unit that gathers its necessities by work down on the farm. Beyond the obvious functions of caring, sharing and sup-

porting one another, the family can be utilized for educational, economic and social growth.

OUR FAMILY has planned travel opportunities that have greatly enriched the lives of each person. I know of a couple who have just retired. They are selling their house to their daughter and her new husband. The family can be a healing element in our lives. Nowhere is there more apt to be the potential for forgiveness, caring and love than within families.

However, we can hurt the people we love the most. Healing elements of love, support and especially forgiveness must be emphasized as necessary elements of family life. We can be determined to heal hurts when they occur. A philosophy and a problem-solving method needs to be constructed.

There is enough stress and hurt in the world. The family needs to be a source of life, healing and connectedness.

The Rev. David Strong is the pastor of St. Matthew United Methodist Church.

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