

Obituary

WILLIAM ROBERT EDGAR 1942–92

The sudden death of Bill Edgar just after his 50th birthday saddened and shocked The Leprosy Mission International and a wide section of the international leprosy community. At the time of his death Bill was General Director of TLMI, and had been newly inducted as President of the International Federation of Anti-Leprosy Associations (ILEP).

An Australian, Bill was born into leprosy work. His father was deeply involved in TLM affairs, becoming the Mission's National Secretary.

Bill read economics and politics at Monash University, Melbourne, receiving a Bachelor's degree in 1964. This was followed by a Masters in Business Administration in 1971. He entered business, travelling widely, and was appointed Managing Director of MICA and Insulating Supplies Company. During these years he maintained his interest in leprosy as a member of the TLM Australia Council.

In 1977, following his participation in a TLM conference in Singapore, Bill accepted a challenge to relinquish his business career for a full-time appointment as Secretary for Australia. This involved him in promotional and fund raising activities in which his dynamism soon became evident.

In 1980 he was offered appointment as Communications Director for The Leprosy Mission International, based in London, a position he and his family readily accepted, even though it meant transfer to the UK.

In 1987 he was appointed General Director, the senior executive position in the Mission. Bill brought many talents to the role. He was a skilled and active manager whose gifts of analysis were matched by an ability to work out practical applications. Bill got results. He also understood the difference between the possible and the desirable.

As headboy and cricket captain at school (he never lost his enthusiasm for sports), through university lectureships in management, throughout his business career and subsequent work with TLMI, Bill led from the front.

At times his management showed a superficial toughness, but underneath this there lay both a deep compassion for people, particularly for those suffering the results of neglected leprosy, and a strong commitment to do whatever was possible to help. His primary concern was for the individual and his needs, although he had a wide understanding of leprosy work and its objectives, and the need for positive management.

During his 5 years as General Director of TLMI the international team of key workers was transformed. Under his vigorous leadership the Mission expanded its already extensive work in India, and added significant new commitments in Africa and South-East Asia.

In all he did he was lovingly and actively supported by his wife Mary, and their 2 daughters Narelle and Delise.

Bill was greatly strengthened by his Christian faith. He was not a 'pious' or exhibitionist Christian but his beliefs, attitudes and actions were motivated by his lifetime commitment.

He faced his sudden serious illness, which accelerated after a relatively short period of feeling unwell, with the same strength he brought to his life and work, looking openly and honestly at the prospect of his death with great courage and assurance.

He leaves The Leprosy Mission International, ILEP and the international community of leprosy, both patients and workers, the poorer by his absence. He is deeply missed by his family, to whom our loving sympathy goes, but we rejoice at a life lived warmly, creatively and positively.

A. D. ASKEW