



featured alumnus:

by Dr. David L. McKenna

"Big minds talk about ideas, middle-sized minds talk about events, and small minds talk about people."

F. Wesley Walls is a big mind. Over a period of almost twenty years now, I have known him as a brother in Christ, a colleague in Christian higher education, and a friend in whom I have full confidence. Every meeting with him is an experience in ideas. After the chit-chat that is necessary to catch up on the weather and family, Dr. Walls gets an unmistakable gleam in his eye and says, "I've been thinking . . ." It is an invitation to a dialogue. What follows may be a look at a political, religious or an academic issue which Dr. Walls so often calls "another dimension." Even though his thinking shows the fine edge of a disciplined, scholarly mind, he always ends up taking the long view on the side of hope. No burnt ashes are left in your mouth or your mind after conversing with Wesley Walls. The after effect is a stretched mind and a glow of optimism.

Such qualities of life do not come ready-made. Behind the man is the goodly heritage of a Free Methodist minister's home. Dr. Walls' father and mother, The Rev. and Mrs. E. Wilbur Walls, ministered in the Oklahoma, Nebraska-Wyoming and Iowa Conferences for forty years before retiring to Seattle, Washington in order to be near their family, including the other Dr. Walls, Paul, who is Chairman of the Board of Trustees at Seattle Pacific University, and Mrs. Mable Walls Joy, a housewife. Mrs. Wilbur Walls died in 1979, but Rev. Walls is still seen walking across the campus as if recharging his youthful spirit with the energy of college students. Of all the honors that have come to Wesley Walls, perhaps none exceeds the moment when his father enrolled in his Political Science class at the age of 82 under the title of a "Senior Learner."

As an itinerant minister's son, Wesley Walls learned to adjust from school to school until he graduated from Central High School in 1933. Two years later, he graduated from Central College and moved on to Greenville College, where he earned his B.A. degree in History in 1937. While at Central College, he met Elizabeth Pickering, Class of '35, and married her after completing college. "Buffy," as she is known to those of us who love her, complements the gifts of her husband as a homemaker,



Dr. F. Wesley Walls

hostess and church leader. Together, they moved to Seattle in 1941 and began their teaching ministry at Seattle Pacific College and, at that same time, to permit Wesley to complete a Master's degree in History at the University of Washington. Military service intervened twice during his teaching career. In both World War II and the Korean conflict, Chaplain Walls ministered on the front lines where he would be awakened during the shelling with the thought, "The next one might be for me."

Back once again as a Professor at Seattle Pacific, Dr. Walls went from honor to honor — a Danforth Fellowship in 1957, a Ph.D. from the University of Washington in 1958, and a Fulbright-Hayes grant for study in India in 1964. Soon, he was sought for administrative duties; first, as Dean of Academic Affairs at Spring Arbor College from 1967-69, and then back to Seattle Pacific as Dean of Liberal Studies in 1970-72.

Although his scholarly career will never close out, Dr. Walls has scaled down his teaching time in order to continue independent study, travel with his wife in their recreational vehicle, and enjoy his family and five grandchildren. Four children honor their father and mother in varied careers: Forrest, a lawyer; Burton, an electrical contractor; Francine, a librarian; and Sylvia, an advertising agency production manager. Just recently, Francine, Assistant Director of Weter Memorial Library for Public Services at Seattle Pacific, gave her father the highest compliment when she said, "I want to give my life and contribute to Christian higher education as my father has."

Thousands of students over 39 years of the teaching, administrative and ministerial career of Dr. F. Wesley Walls would echo Francine's words about his contribution. Mayors, ambassadors, Congressmen and other public officials caught the initial spark for careers as Christians in public service from the enthusiasm of Dr. Walls' teaching and counsel.

So, if you are ever on the road and hear the code name "Hi Walls" coming over a CB radio from a recreational vehicle, send back the message, "I have an idea . . ." and one of Central's most distinguished alumni, Dr. F. Wesley Walls, will meet you at the next coffee stop.

