

UN Day of Peace

Hamburg, Germany, 20. September 2014



We chose the topic 'The Family is the First School of Peace' for our event, based on the founding principles of UPF (Universal Peace Federation). The participants came from cultures as different as Africa and India, and included Peace Ambassadors and environmentalists. And as our speaker, we were delighted to welcome Hilde Piepenburg who, accompanied by her husband, came all the way from Frankfurt.

After a brief welcome by Gerhard Toelke, Mrs Piepenburg, mother of four children and a psychology student, outlined the historical developments leading to our present understanding of family. She made us aware that our current understanding of family as the natural biological unit consisting of father, mother and children, was not the concept of family held by our ancestors. The family was seen rather as a larger household or extended family. It was only with the advent of the 'bourgeois family' in the 18th century that the modern concept of family developed, and it is still not commonly recognized as the only institution endowed by the creator.

This was the main focus of the second part of Mrs Piepenburg's talk, which continued after a short refreshment break. In today's society, the impression given by the media is that the family is outdated. So-called 'alternative' lifestyles are presented as

progressive, although polls show that 80% of young people wish to have a traditional family.



Even though homosexual partnerships make up less than 1% of the total, they receive such disproportionate attention so that family values become blurred and on the defensive.

And this has fatal consequences for society.

Increasing indifference and isolation leads to a significantly colder social climate. Divorce and lack of family support become contributing factors in the increase in mental illness. Our inability to deal well with an ageing society is another factor which contributes to the disintegration of the family system. So again, we need clarity about the importance of family for our life. In addition, we need a hopeful vision of how we can move the family from the periphery to the centre of life in our society.

Of course, this topic stimulated lively discussion and exchange of ideas in the break and after the presentation. Mrs Piepenburg took advantage of extra time to further expand on the family model and how we can ourselves build a good family.

Countless psychological studies show that the family is a supportive environment for children and young people. Couples who achieve a successful partnership

are healthier and have more longevity. Ultimately, each one of us owes our life to a father and a mother, and this will continue to be the case despite advances in medical technology.

At the end of the presentation, discussion and more personal exchanges continued, and a very warm and companionable atmosphere was generated.

