

## UPF Abuja, Nigeria's 1-Day Blessing Workshop for 36 Nigerian married couples

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Abuja, Nigeria—A one-day workshop for 36 Nigerian married couples has been held in preparation for a Family Peace Blessing in the community.

The program was held on May 20, 2017, as a follow-up to the May 15 celebration of the UN International Day of Families. Each of the 36 couples not only was preparing to participate in the marriage blessing but also was working to raise 12 couples to form a network of 432 couples for the peace in the community.

The 2017 International Day of Families was commemorated at a Family Leadership Conference in Uyo, the capital of Akwa Ibom State, by the Nigerian chapters of UPF and Family Federation for World Peace and Unification (FFWPU), an affiliated organization. More than 250 participants attended the event.

Afterward, UPF and FFWPU sent out letters to community leaders proposing follow-up activities in their communities. The proposal requested each leader to forward the names of 36 outstanding couples in their community to join the Couples for Peace Initiative.

In response to the request, the Gbessa and Kardo communities of the Federal Capital Territory, as well as two communities in Oyo and Benue states, expressed interest. In the FCT, Uwa Ekop and Mosa Essien served as outreach officers for the initiative and held meetings with the Gbessa and Kardo community leaders. The traditional ruler of the Gbessa community directed the elders and secretary of the community chiefs to work with the outreach officers to recommend 36 couples.

The outreach officers informed the chiefs, as indicated in our letters, that participants should be monogamous couples who have lived exemplary lives in the community and are taking responsibility for their children properly. Unfortunately, the traditional ruler of the community, Alhaji Musa Yetu, a Muslim, has more than one wife and was struggling about how to be involved in the Couples for Peace Initiative. The outreach officers were worried that he might discourage the hosting of the event in the community. We proposed that the chief be informed that he would be presented with an Ambassador for Peace certificate at the opening session of the program. When he got this information, he was so excited and doubled his efforts to ensure that the event would be held in his community.

The list of 36 couples was sent to the office, and we agreed on the date and time. Initially, the event was to be held at the community chief's palace, but when he learned of the Ambassador for Peace honor, he suggested that the venue be shifted to the community's primary school. By 10 a.m., we were in the community and met some of the participating couples at the arranged hall. As soon as we arrived, news of our presence spread across the community, and the nominated couples started arriving at the venue. The event started at about 11:30 a.m. with the nominated couples and others who had heard about the event and decided to attend as observers.

The event was not the marriage blessing itself but rather, a one-day workshop on the family peace blessing ceremony. More than 100 participants attended the event, most of whom were couples. Others were single young adults. Uwa Ekop gave the opening remarks, in which he introduced the community chief and the officers of UPF and FFWPU, including the FFWPU national president, Rev. George Ogurie.

The opening prayer was offered by the community chief, who prayed for the success of the program and urged participants to be serious about the initiative. Rev. Ogurie of FFWPU gave the opening address, an introduction to FFWPU and UPF, in which he spoke highly of the founders and the many activities that these organizations are carrying out around the world.

Rev. Ogurie encouraged the participants to welcome the initiative as a special opportunity of a lifetime and urged them to be open to learn and participate in all the stages of the program. The family peace blessing program was introduced to them as a community peace and development program centering on the empowerment of couples and strengthening of marriages and families.

UPF-Nigeria Secretary General Dr. Raphael Oko was invited by Dr. George Ikpot, the secretary general of the Nigerian chapter of Professors World Peace Academy (PWPA), an affiliated organization, to introduce the award. Dr. Oko explained the meaning of the Ambassadors for Peace and asked the participants to confirm if it was proper for the chief to receive the award. Everyone in the hall voted in support of the proposal to present the certificate to the chief, as they described him as a peaceful leader. At that point, Rev. Ogurie of FFWPU was invited to present the certificate and medal. As he made the presentation, everyone applauded him and congratulated the chief.



The next activity was the main lecture on the blessing. Dr. Oko, who served as the lecturer, explained the background of the program and informed the participants that the Nigerian chapters of UPF and FFWPU were offering the education to the 36 couples as the foundation couples for the initiative. They were informed that at the end of the workshop, each of the 36 couples would be encouraged to reach out to 12 other couples to join their “couples for peace team” to attend the marriage blessing.

The lecture covered the five steps of the blessing. In the course of the presentation, the participants were asked, “What makes a person either a man or a woman?” Many of them gave different answers, and eventually one of the participants answered by saying that it is the “private organ” that determines whether someone is a man or woman. It was explained that Father and Mother Moon teach that what makes a person male or female is the sexual organ. The audience all applauded the explanation. In addition, they were taught that the man’s sexual organ belongs to his wife and the woman’s sexual organ belongs to her husband. The participants were urged to teach this fundamental lesson to everyone in their community. They were told that if they do so, they will receive great blessings and their community will grow well.

After the lectures, a Christian pastor who had come as an observer spoke in support of the program and prayed for the success of the initiative. He suggested the need to involve the unmarried persons in such programs to help them prepare well for their marriage. He pledged to bring members of his church to attend the next program for the couples.

Participants asked several questions covering the five steps of the blessing, and the questions were satisfactorily answered. It was thereafter resolved that the main blessing ceremony would be held on June 3, 2017. Each of the 36 couples was presented with a certificate of participation in the follow-up program to the UN International Day of Families 2017. They agreed to each take responsibility for 12 couples who will attend a similar workshop and participate in the blessing ceremony too.

Some of the couples who were not included in the 36 couples signed up for the next workshop that will lead to the blessing ceremony. The Christian pastor offered the closing prayer, with a pledge to return again with his members for the blessing ceremony on June 3. The news of the program is spreading throughout the community, and more couples are going to the outreach officers to register their names for the next workshop and to attend the blessing ceremony.