

My mission as president of the Women's Federation for World Peace in Italy

Elisabetta Nistri
February 2015



WFWP joins forces with the Nigerian community to demand the return of girls kidnapped last year.

I am rather a shy person; when I speak in public, I have to push myself. After I began my mission as president of the Women's Federation for World Peace in Italy, appearing as a public speaker was always an internal battle. Yet because I feel there is so much I can say to help and inspire other people from what I have learned in my life of faith following True Parents, I always found the courage and a deep motivation. I realize that good people can feel something beyond the simple words I say; they feel the sincere heart behind them, because I feel inspiration from God when I am speaking. Of course, it is not always easy to insert God's message into some of the topics on which I am asked to speak. I had been used to giving the Sunday sermon as pastor of the Rome church; now I had to learn new ways to approach and express God's heart for humankind.

Other WFWP sisters and I set a goal to find Abel-type women working for peace in our society, women who appeal to the noblest feminine feelings to heal humanity's wounds. We sought to work with these women through the Global Peace Network, to guide them to know True Parents. By organizing meetings focused on "A Woman's Dignity," "The Role of a Mother," "The Marital Relationship," and "Women and Human Rights," I could discover and get to know many women that deeply treasure these themes and are actively working in ways related to them, each in their own field -- political, religious or ethnical.

We do not have an office in Rome, just our headquarters in Colle Mattia, a town outside the city in the beautiful countryside. As it is difficult to invite new people to come there from Rome, I started to look for other ways to meet people. I began to attend conferences about peace that featured inter-religious dialogue or dealt with issues related to women. I took advantage of these opportunities to introduce myself to the people sitting next to me and to befriend them, until I could contact the speakers themselves.

Before very long, *Lux Terrae* (Light of the Earth) an association advocating holism, invited me to speak at four different events. These were daylong conference at which each speaker had twenty to thirty minutes. At one of them, in a prestigious auditorium in Rome, I introduced the Global Women's Peace Network project.

I also spoke about our True Father's life and his vision for world peace and introduced his autobiography, copies of which I made available at the back of the room. This was to members of the public that the supporting organization had invited. I was challenging myself and overcoming my fear.

Furthermore, the local municipal library gave us permission to use their auditorium for our WFWP conferences, free of charge, on the understanding that we would present topics that were also of interest to them. We held meetings with such titles as "Japanese Writing and Differences between East and West," "Anorexia and other Eating Disorders," and "Beauty as an Obsession," and "Hemispheres of the Brain and a Couple's Relationship." To these three conferences, we also invited expert speakers in the relative fields. The library had invited many of the people that came to listen.

I studied the topics and introduced counterproposals inspired by the Divine Principle. I spoke about the causes of young people's deviant behavior, the lack of ideals in life, interactive relationships in the family,

the four realms of heart, and the dynamics in a couple's relationship. I drew also upon True Mother's teachings about our roles as sisters, wives and mothers.

On one of these occasions, the president of the Nigerian community association in Rome, who was present, asked me to come to speak to Nigerian families. A deep friendship began to develop between us, and she invited me to speak at various events sponsored by members of the Nigerian community. She always introduced me with great respect and admiration for Rev. Moon's movement. Later she attended a one-day Divine Principle workshop.

The first occasion was the launching a mini-basketball team for the children of the Nigerian community. Religious leaders in the Catholic Church, in Islam and in other local groups attended. For the children it was a blessing. The purpose was to get the children involved in sports and thus get them off the street, and to teach them to understand the value of respecting rules. For the second, we, members of the Nigerian community and the Municipality of Rome organized a march to protest the kidnapping by Boko Haram of 276 girls from a government secondary school in April 2014. We marched through the streets of the capital city under the slogan "Bring Back Our Girls!" Finally, Nigerian families invited me to speak about the husband– wife relationship and the four realms of heart in their community's Catholic Church. (I had to improvise to give the talk in English!) I also came to know the woman responsible for the Seventh Day Adventist Church's Department of Religious Freedom. She participated as a speaker in one of our conferences and afterward invited me to talk at one of their meetings. I spoke about a woman's role as a peacemaker and the importance of protecting and defending women's rights so that women can be free to contribute, with men, to the realization of a peaceful culture. Later she attended World Summit 2014, in Korea in August. She expressed great interest and apparently experienced enjoyment. Since her return from Korea, our friendship has grown deeper. She greatly respects WFWP's and UPF's work to promote inter-religious dialogue and defend women's dignity. She read True Father's autobiography.

Over the past two years, we have held two conferences at the offices of the European Parliament in Rome, which let us use their hall without paying. For these events, I had to prepare myself to speak about "Women's response to the economic crisis" and "Women and human rights: equality is progress, prosperity and wellbeing for everyone." I invited knowledgeable speakers to present their analyses and ideas, and I completed the exposition by giving a Unificationist's view from the perspective of what women could contribute. At the end, I introduced Father's proposal for the creation of a United Nations inter-religious council and the Global Women's Peace Network.



In the Church of Saint Maria Maggiore, one of the three most important Catholic basilica in Rome, Elisabetta Nistri (in the green blouse) president of WFWP in Italy received an award from the International Golden Fortune Academy of Ukraine for WFWP's support, which she spearheaded, of the Ukrainian community in Italy.

During a conference held at the offices of the European Parliament in Rome, the president of the Ukrainian community there met our Women's Federation. She later participated with great interest in international and European WFWP conferences and was very impressed by the spirit of cooperation among the participants from so many different nations. After listening to Dr. Moon Lan-young's testimony, she told me, "I think you are very lucky to have known Rev. Moon personally, now that he is not with us any longer."

From that time, a close cooperation began to develop between WFWP and the Ukrainian community. I participated in different meetings within the Ukrainian community, such as the end-of-the year celebration of the Ukrainian school in Rome. I always tried to convey a message of peace, of respect for diversity and of the unique value of each person as a child of God, which is WFWP's core message.

In March 2014, at a second conference at the European Parliament, on the subject "Women and Human Rights: Equality is Progress, Prosperity and Well-being for Everyone," I invited the president of the Ukrainian community to talk. She has since spoken at a number of WFWP events. A recent one, on December 12 last year, was a joint UPF–WFWP conference on "The Right of People to Live in Peace," at which she spoke about the situation of her own people as an example of self-determination and fighting for freedom. We held the conference at the Pontifical University of St. Thomas Aquinas, a historic Catholic University in Rome, where the late Pope John Paul II (1920–2005) studied. The university hosted the event free of charge and even publicized it on the university Facebook page. The dean of the university addressed the conference himself. Immediately afterward, he had to leave for the Vatican to meet with Pope Francesco. We asked him to send our love and greetings to the Pope. This event permitted very meaningful cooperation with an important Catholic institution.

Through these various means, I have come to know many organizations and individuals. I recorded the names of some four hundred contacts, whom I provide updates on major WFWP events.

To conclude, I can say that until a few years ago, achieving such results appeared to be a dream. I feel we are starting to climb up the rungs of a ladder that allows us to be recognized by society, institutions and the religious world, so that our True Parents can be duly acknowledged for the ideology of peace that Unification Thought presents, and for their great work. I realize that it does not matter if one does not have a university degree. Speak from the heart and with wisdom, and Abel-type people will realize the value of what you are offering. They feel we are different, that they can trust us and work with us. They can sense that we do not have any ulterior motive, but that we are looking for peace and for solutions to the problems facing humankind.