

## UPF Giessen, Germany's July International Café: Life of Yvette Yamanaka

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The July International Cafe event in Giessen on July 27, 2024, attracted an audience of 25. This month featured the life story and experiences of Yvette Yamanaka. We first saw a video of the spectacular mountainous area in South-East France where Yvette was born in the mid-1950s. She grew up as the middle child of seven in the village of Saint-Aupre, north of Grenoble. In a predominantly Catholic France, there are many places named after saints, and this region alone has seven such 'holy' locations.

Yvette grew up in a humble home where religion played a central role, and it was a matter of course to attend the service at the Catholic church every Sunday. Yvette's father was a postman and her mother, who had originally wanted to become a nun, dedicated herself to caring for and raising the children. The family also managed a small farm as a side-line.

Several people had a great influence on Yvette during her childhood. Firstly, her mother who always had a heart for others, an uncle who was a priest, and some young people from the neighbouring village who went as missionaries to Africa. Later Jesus and pacifists such as Gandhi and Martin-Luther King became her role models. She was involved in the youth work of the local Catholic church and helped at Sunday services.

After graduating from high school, she undertook her first journey abroad, to London, England to work for one month as an au-pair girl in a Jewish family. This was her first interesting and eye-opening experience with people of another faith!



It had always been Yvette's dream follow a profession where she could help others. Her first choice was to be a physical therapist, but because there was a long entry waiting list, she decided to use the time to study medicine at the University of Grenoble. She really wanted also to work in a project involving the rehabilitation of young offenders but was too young.

It was in the 1970s, when she was a first-year student at Grenoble, that she came into contact with members of the Unification Church. Inspired by the teachings and community life, she joined the movement and eventually moved to Paris where she continued to be very involved in many church activities. Her missionary work took her all over the world - to countries such as the USA, Israel, Korea, Japan. She also became proficient as a goldsmith and visited Taiwan several times to train new workers.

In 1982 Yvette married a young Japanese man, also a member of the Unification Church, who had already been living for some time in Europe. When he moved from the United Kingdom to Germany, Yvette joined him. They have three adult children and live in Wetzlar, not far from Giessen.

Handicraft work has been one of Yvette's passions since childhood and she finds this today very useful in her work as a carer for school children. She deals with children from many different backgrounds and in this way makes a substantial contribution to their good integration. She is a person who is always there for others with heart and soul.

Her presentation stimulated several questions from the audience, which Yvette answered with humour and honesty.

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