

David Ryan: The Value of Traditional Marriage Through the Blessing of Marriage

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David Ryan and his wife Valerie

"She'll be right, mate!" is an oft used expression from the "[Land Down Under](#)" which exemplifies the Australian spirit of optimism. Few people better express that "Can do! Things will work out!" spirit better than David Ryan, UTS class of '85. Born in Melbourne, Australia, David was raised in a brood of eleven siblings. His parents, who met and married during World War II, were faithful members of the Roman Catholic faith, and escorted their children to [Mass](#) every week.

David attended [Monash University](#) in Melbourne where he earned a degree in economics and politics. "When I graduated, I really didn't know what I wanted to do. I looked for work related my degree, but I felt too unsettled within myself to focus on a career. Since childhood I had a strong desire to travel to the United States so after university I hitch-hiked around Australia for a couple of years and worked whatever jobs I could find to earn money for my travel plans." Like many of his fellow countrymen and women those were big plans; Australians often take a year or two off from "normal" life to do "walkabouts" around the world. Ryan states, "My original idea was to visit Central and South America and find unique ethnic products to sell in an import/export business. In the process I knew I would see more of the world so I felt I was moving in a good direction."

But in his heart, Ryan realized that his deeper quest was being driven by more than economics. "I was on a spiritual search really; it seemed to me that so many people in big cities were unhappy or sometimes just angry. I was curious to discover if people living in smaller town environments or villages were more content. So many things going on in the world just didn't make sense to me; I figured there must be a better way of living."

In 1978 after saving enough money he determined to go to Mexico City prior to the Americas where he would continue to develop his business plan. Ryan sailed on a ship called The New Zealand, but as Mexico City is inland with no ocean access, his first port of call was Los Angeles, CA. Once he set foot in California, a visit to the Golden Gate Bridge in San Francisco resulted in an unexpected detour that would change his life.

During his first day in San Francisco he encountered members of the Unification Church (UC) now known as the [Family Federation for World Peace and Unification](#) (FFWPU). "I was approached by Peter Ross the first day I arrived in the Bay Area and was invited for a meal and a presentation on the teachings of the Unification Church. When I heard the lectures so many of the stories from my religious upbringing were illuminated. Although my overall experience with the Catholic Church was good I just didn't feel the message was relevant to my life. I never really felt I had a personal relationship with God or Jesus Christ." Upon studying the Unification beliefs as laid out in the [Divine Principle](#), the light really came on for David. He recalls, "I was totally hooked. I really felt I had found what I wanted to devote my life to. I just knew that this was a valuable way to use my life."

After joining the UC David participated in the [UC Home Church](#) movement in New York City, then spent nearly two years raising funds for UC projects before becoming a member of [CARP](#), the UC student organization. Through the CARP movement he learned that members who had an undergraduate degree

were eligible to attend the [Unification Theological Seminary](#) (UTS). "At this point, I decided I wanted to go to UTS. Although I didn't really consider myself an academic I felt attending UTS was an opportunity I couldn't pass up."

"My academic abilities were really developed at UTS; by my third year I was doing a considerable amount of writing and my skills were being fine-honed." Recalling individual professors, Ryan says, "I remember Dr. Tsirpanlis quite well; through him I got a good grasp of church history. Dr. Boslooper of the Dutch Reform Church was also wonderful and I had great experiences with the philosophy professor, Dr. Matczak, and Dr. Joseph McMahon who taught counselling; I remember all of them."

David spent three years at UTS before graduating in 1985 with a [Master of Divinity](#) degree. From there on, it was back to full time mission work, first as the UC state leader of Maine, followed by a similar position in Idaho, and finally in Seattle, WA where he arrived in 1992 with his wife, Valerie, (also a UTS graduate,) with whom he received the [Marriage Blessing](#) in 1982.



David, Valerie and some of their children.

Being a pastor with little income, with a growing family (eventually six children), and with debt accumulating, was a challenge for the whole family and sometimes created a stressful situation. "It isn't easy to pastor a faith community. If a couple isn't totally united it can be really difficult." Finding a healthy balance between serving the church members while needing to continually invest in one's marriage and family can be a hard path to walk. Still, the Ryans' many sacrifices did not go unnoticed; Valerie's father generously offered the couple two acres of land and they were able to build their family home. Valerie obtained a nursing degree and David began working for a company that makes aircraft interiors. Having moved to Bellingham from Seattle, David continued as Bellingham's pastor, but he has never accepted any payment for his ministerial work.

"We have a small community of about 10 families with various levels of involvement. We change things up from week to week, but always gather for Sunday service. Initially, we were meeting in different homes – whoever gave the service would open their home for the gathering." Over the years the community has evolved and grown. Ryan says, "I continue to organize Sunday service and the location, but each family works out the format and determines who is giving service. We have always kept all the Holy Days and honored the tradition of Sunday Service. We may be a small group, but I believe we have been a very faithful community."

Recently, the Ryans' son, Toby, moved with his wife from South Carolina and were welcomed into the local church. "Overall we are a close knit, faithful community with many wonderful people of solid, mature faith; we are an intimate group." Because the community has grown in size, meeting on Sunday in individual homes was no longer an option. David states, "At present we are renting a [VFW](#) hall – it is immaculate - very clean, lovely, with good facilities for sharing meals. We have also been building up a savings account so before too long we should be able to purchase our own dedicated church building. It has meant so much to have a good meeting place. Everyone works full time and it is wonderful to have a public place to meet and not have concerns about inviting people you don't know well into your home."

Although David has not always had time to keep current with old friends from his UTS days, he says when he has an opportunity to meet up with fellow alumni, he experiences that "We're friends straight away. I think about old friends from UTS, but my life has been so involved dealing with day to day reality that I haven't always had time to maintain active relationships."

Regarding the value of a degree from a seminary, Ryan is very certain; "My UTS education was invaluable to me and my work. I didn't realize this fully when I graduated, but in the years that followed it became clear to me that the exposure I had to psychology, different theologies and ideologies allowed me to interact confidently with ministers, and educated people. Because of my studies at UTS – no minister could intimidate me – I knew as much as anyone did about theology – I understood what they knew. In that sense, UTS prepared me well. The spectrum of our studies was broad and I gained so much. Before attending UTS I knew the Divine Principle, but I sometimes felt overwhelmed meeting professors or ministers. After my experience at the seminary, I felt that I could confidently meet with anyone and talk to them. It's not so much my depth of knowledge, but the broad exposure which helped me."

David steadfastly encourages current students at UTS; the education they will receive through UTS is well worth their time. "Your competence will be assured. It won't be just an academic exercise." David also strongly encourages students to branch out ecumenically. "Be sure you go visit someone else's church! The broad curriculum will support you to have a unique experience and to certainly go beyond your own denomination."

Despite the current political tug of war in American politics and the social order where many average citizens are wracked with anxiety, Ryan feels strongly that a brighter future is coming. "I am completely optimistic about the United States and I'm also optimistic about the work of FFWPU. As our members' families multiply I see an expansion of goodness. I really do believe the future is bright despite all the battles that may be happening right now. I think we are the cavalry and eventually we will save the day!"



David and Valerie with their grandchildren.

One activity David has been actively involved with is upholding the value of traditional marriage through the blessing of marriage. He speaks enthusiastically about what his community is doing on the local level. "We have just set up a tent outside a local Wal Mart and have invited people to re-dedicate their marriages. We offer them Holy Wine and they can renew their vows. People are so inspired!" Ryan isn't naïve, he acknowledges the difficulties many people face. "There are a lot of broken-hearted people in a lot of pain out there. We actually end up doing a lot of counseling. But in the midst of this spiritual chaos we can provide a path towards salvation."

At this point, he has booked three Saturdays at Walmart for August. "So far we have had 32 couples renew their vows in two days, including several Native American couples. We follow up our contacts with an email and a photo of the couple. I have found that by the end of the day I experience really being "on a roll". There are so many people in the world dealing with so much pain, and this can be a healing experience for many."

Working full time, balancing pastoral efforts and family life doesn't leave a great deal of free time. When asked what he does for fun, Ryan sighs, "We're often so tired by the weekend that we quite enjoy staying at our house and being homebodies. We sometimes go for a stroll on the boardwalk in Bellingham and we love to go for hikes when time permits. But we have a beautiful garden with flowers, vegetables and fruit trees growing all around. And we live in a rural area which is surrounded with hay fields – it's very tranquil. We are fortunate not to be surrounded by many houses; instead we surrounded by nature so we just enjoy the peace of the natural world."