

## UPF USA's Importance of Motherhood and Fatherhood for Integral Development

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New York City, United States — The importance of both fathers and mothers was the focus of an event held at the United Nations to commemorate Global Day of Parents.

“The Importance of Motherhood and Fatherhood for Integral Development” was the title of a side event organized on June 1, 2016, by the Universal Peace Federation together with the Permanent Observer Mission of the Holy See to the United Nations.

The speakers were leading experts and well-known authors in the area of family and parenting.

In his opening remarks Archbishop Bernardito Auza, the permanent observer of the Holy See to the UN, addressed the mission of parents as teachers to help form values like compassion, solidarity, trust, mutual respect, responsibility, education, hard work, compassion and other values that are necessary for global citizens to live in harmony as a society.



Archbishop Auza referred to Pope Francis’ recently published exhortation *Amoris Laetitia* (“The Joy of Love”). In particular, he emphasized the pope’s statement “The welfare of the family is decisive for the future of the world.” The pope stressed the crucial role of mothers and said that an authentic feminism should not negate motherhood. He also said that the weakening of the maternal presence with its feminine qualities poses a great risk to our world. Mothers need to be appreciated because motherhood is an antidote to the spread of self-centered individualism. Surrounded by the mother’s tenderness and compassion, a child will grow in confidence and feel that the world is a good and welcoming place. This will help the child’s self-esteem and capacity for empathy.

Likewise, the archbishop said, fatherhood is crucial to the raising of a child. Through the father the child becomes able to perceive the limits of life and will be open to challenges of the world, for he or she will learn the need for hard work and effort. The pope did not want people to focus on fathers’ and mothers’

individual aspects but rather as a harmonious operation for the good of their children. The complimentary teamwork of the father and mother brings harmony to the child, and the love from both, and love between both, creates a solid foundation for the family and the future of the children.

Dr. Thomas Walsh, president of the Universal Peace Federation, spoke of the family as a social asset that “needs to be better construed in terms of its existing contributions and its underutilized potential to promote development.”

Dr. Walsh also said: “In our UPF programs we often say that ‘the family is the school of love.’ ... However, the family also transmits and teaches, through the parents, many other virtues, capacities, dispositions, attitudes and skills. For this reason, the family, and parenting, deserves and should be included in discussions of development.”

After the opening remarks by the host organizations, Dr. Bradford Wilcox, director of the National Marriage Project at the University of Virginia, spoke on “Parenthood in Transition and the Consequences for Families and Society.” Speaking about the nature of family life around the world, he cited studies about the retreat from parenthood through falling fertility and the retreat from marriage due to divorce, cohabitation, non-marital childbearing as well as the rise of single parenthood. On each issue he explained in depth how it affects the economy, population, and the child’s success in the future.

Another speaker, Mr. Brian Caulfield, director of the Fathers for Good initiative of the Knights of Columbus (FathersForGood.org), addressed the “Importance of Fatherhood for Men, Women, Children and Society.” He spoke about the consequences of the absence of a father in the development of the child. He also raised the issue of fatherhood being expendable when things go wrong in a household. He said he believes that this notion is commonly portrayed in the media and is a problem that should be addressed at a national level.



The next speaker, Cheryl Wetzstein, who is the special sections manager for The Washington Times newspaper and a former national reporter for family and social issues, addressed the “Importance of Motherhood for Women, Men, Children and Society.” She told the audience three major points to take away from her segment: the mother’s self-sacrifice during pregnancy; becoming a mother as a lasting experience because the cognitive part of the brain is remodeled in a good way in the year after childbirth; and lastly the emotional intelligence that the mother acquires during motherhood.

The next speaker was Dr. Meg Meeker, a well-known pediatrician, author and expert on parenting, teens and children’s health. In her talk, “How Mothers and Fathers Working Together Strengthen Men, Women, Children and Society,” she mentioned that parents need to think about the child’s perspective. As a child advocate, she stated that the problems that children face today are different from those experienced in earlier eras, due largely to the increase in the time spent with electronic devices. She encouraged parents to think about how the children think about them, and the challenges they face today.

The final speaker was Dr. Deborah MacNamara, a clinical counselor at the Neufeld Institute, educator and author. Speaking on “Parenting in the Digital Age,” she said, “It is essential to know the importance of exposing only certain tools to our children in the digital world.” She spoke about choosing tools for the betterment of the child and said that the exposure to all the tools will derail the child’s development. She emphasized that parents today need to show tool usage properly to create a new norm.

After the speakers gave their talks, a question-and-answer session followed from a very enthusiastic and diverse audience of around 300 people. UPF USA brought to the program more than twenty participants who were all very excited to pose questions to the distinguished speakers.