

The Unification Theological Seminary's Conference on Theology and the Family

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Photo date and location unknown

On May 29-31, the Unification Theological Seminary sponsored a conference in Barrytown centered on the questions of theology and the family. Eleven couples, six Unificationist couples and five from other orientations, met for a day and a half on unusually candid, thoughtful, and intense discussion of topics relating to the theology of marriage and the family as a religious institution. The conference was marked by much sharing of experience and humanity as well as theory.

Many of the participants have been married for several years and are parents of children; some are engaged and about to embark on the enterprise of marriage and family. But, as one participant noted, in one way or another, the couples all experienced their commitment to marriage and family as "a new beginning" and take their commitment most seriously as a central focal point of life.

Unificationist couples present were David and Tacco Hose, Farley and Betsy Jones, Hugh and Nora Spurgin, and Ernie and Therese Stewart. Engaged couples included Franz Feige and Diana Muxworthy and John Maniatis and Jaime Sheeran.

The conference conversations were based on previously prepared and circulated papers on topics including "Crisis in the Theological Conception of the Family"; "How To Strike a 'Match' ... And Keep It Burning"; "Risk, Courage, and the Family"; "The Middle Years in Unification Developing a Tradition"; and "The Family and the Eschaton, Developing a Tradition of Religious Education" Discussions were expertly moderated by Frank Flinn, conference organizer.

The conference was primarily exploratory, opening up topics for further discussion and examining the possibility and desirability of further collaborative work in the area of theology and the family. At the same time, the discussions provided the immediate reward of being extremely supportive and nourishing for the participants in their on-going family life.

The general conclusion of all was that the conference was most valuable, not only in providing a forum for developing a theology of the family in the modern world, but also in providing an opportunity for couples to share with each other, learning mutually about the strengths and difficulties of family life and supporting each other in efforts to create strong, healthy, and God-centered families.

A number of topics were identified as being of particular interest: definitions of 'nuclear' and 'extended' family; similarities and differences in father and mother roles; relationship of wife and husband; the stages of development in the family; religious education; and the growth and nurture of children.

Throughout the conference, the need for understanding the family was continually sounded. Within the Unification Church, as the average age of members increases, it becomes more and more important to develop a working theology of the family. For those from other religious orientations, the need for new and revitalized ways of understanding the family was expressed.