

Report on UPF/WFWP Conference on International Day of Families

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“We need to regenerate the extended family, which is a microcosm of the wider society that provides a safe environment for children to learn about respect, kindness and service to others”, concluded the group of participants that gathered to commemorate the UN International Day of Families. The South London chapters of UPF (Universal Peace Federation) and WFWP (Women’s Federation for World Peace) combined on 11 May at the Peace Embassy, Thornton Heath, to celebrate the UN day and debate the topic of “Advancing Social Integration and Inter-generational Solidarity”, which had been designated as the official themes for this year’s observance.



An audience of about 40 people had the opportunity to listen to presentations from speakers across the generational and religious spectrum, as well as engage in group discussions to further explore the themes of the conference. Sonja Read, as the MC for the afternoon’s proceedings, introduced the history of the observance day which was inaugurated by the UN General Assembly in 1997 and read excerpts from International UPF’s statement of commemoration. Then performers Hannah Gough and Amelia Warren prepared the atmosphere with a beautiful song and moving piano piece. The first speaker, Nabeela Shah spoke on “The Islamic Perspective on Family and Its Role in Unifying Society”. Illustrating the famous dictum “A family that prays together stays together”, she emphasised that religious practices are a glue that binds the members of the family together. She explained how the holy Koran instructs us to show kindness and empathy, both in our treatment of parents when they are old and dependent on us and in guiding our young children. Dolores Read, chairwoman of WFWP, presented Nabeela with an Ambassador for Peace award for her services to the community as a lecturer at South Thames College in Tooting, where she has been teaching literacy, English and History for ten years.



The second speaker, Nancy Jubb, a communications specialist and undergraduate student at Birkbeck College, University of London, spoke about her experience as a mother of two young daughters and the importance of the relationships within her extended family and faith community. Recalling the African proverb “It takes a village to raise a child”, popularised by Hillary Clinton’s book, Nancy commented on the impossibility of fulfilling modern expectations of combining career with motherhood without the

support of the surrounding community and the older generation, especially grandparents. In a very thoughtful final presentation, Tim Read, former chairman of FFWPU (Family Federation for World Peace and Unification), asked the question “What is marriage and why does it matter?” and explained how the traditional view of marriage as conjugal marriage with its key function of the creation and care of children has been challenged by the view that marriage is just one type of close personal relationship. The latter viewpoint underpins the arguments of supporters of same-sex marriage and those who see marriage simply as dissolvable partnership, which has led to high costs to society. Tim proposed a third view of marriage going beyond partnership, as an institution which binds people to society and enables the manifestation of God’s nature through promoting the maturation of human beings as embodiments of love.



Four discussion groups were formed in the next section of the conference proceedings and they actively debated several questions ranging from the importance of extended families to how community organisations can support building stronger families. Many participants spoke from their own experience of how extended families taught virtues which encouraged them to go outside their families to serve others. It was recognised that grandparents pass on a sense of history and tradition to their grandchildren, giving a softer kind of love than the more disciplining love of parents. Another key point which emerged from the discussions was the significant work that community and faith groups conduct in supporting families, but that there is a need to link up more families with these sources of assistance. The proceedings closed with MC Sonja Read thanking the audience and speakers for their excellent contributions, and the participants finally adjourned to enjoy refreshments and each other’s fellowship.

