

Track Record of Unificationist Marriages Discussed at Press Event

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Rev. Phillip Schanker, director of the Blessed Family Ministry, emceed the press conference.

Psychologist Robert Epstein and a United Methodist Church minister reported on the success of arranged marriages at a press conference titled “Why Arranged Marriages Work” in the New Yorker Hotel on March 12, 2012. Rev. Phillip Schanker, director of the Blessed Family Ministry USA, facilitated the event as Emcee. A video entitled “The Power of True Love” featured the testimonies of Pastor T. L. Barrett and his son, who spoke of the healing effects of the Marriage Blessing ceremony on their marital relationships in times of difficulty, to an audience of about 50 individuals. The conference also heard testimonies from four local candidates for the Marriage Blessing.

Dr. Epstein told the gathering: “My research, which I’ve been conducting since 2003, suggests that arranged marriage in the Unification Church works as well as arranged marriages in other cultures and certainly far better on average than mainstream marriages in the United States. With mainstream Hollywood-inspired marriages failing so badly in the U.S., I think we need to take a close look at other, more successful models for marriage. Unification Church and other arranged marriages can begin to teach us about the possibility of creating marriages in which two committed people work together over time to create stronger bonds – to build a love that gets deeper over the years.”

Remarks from Rev. Luonne Rouse



Rev. Luonne Abram Rouse, minister of the United Methodist Church Minister, said that "The original intent of God was for true love."

Rev. Rouse, a United Methodist Church minister, took the podium as the first of the speakers and said:

“God has so created the world that He has given to us the sacredness of family that is represented in the first man and woman. The validity of the mission of the Rev. Dr. Sun Myung Moon is to return us to the original intent of God that is seen at the beginning, that was lost in the Fall.

“The original intent of God was for true love. True love produces a family that moves in the sacredness of God rather than in the makings of society. In other words, we are to be a people who come together in our unions not because of socialization, but because of the sacred Blessing. Dr. Moon, whom so many of you here today have found to be the man that you call Father Moon, represents with Mrs. Moon the true parentage that God desires for us in this world. That mission brings about his intention within the sacred Blessings of our marriage. To bring individuals to a complete understanding that they are together not because they have designed their own marriage and union, but because their union and marriage has been designed by God.

“When I first witnessed the actual Blessing, here in New York, where Father and Mrs. Moon themselves were here, I was mesmerized to see the thousands of people who gathered seeking truth, to be Blessed into that truth, so that they would have the hope of being sustained in their relationships. In my mind, I was going through what had happened over the years of my maturity as an adult in the 70s, when I first came to the understanding of the importance of family and marriages. Our marriages were only seeing a divorce rate of five percent, no more, in some communities, no more than 12 percent. Today, we will see within any of our communities over 50 percent of our marriages being destroyed. When I saw the Blessing, it gave hope to the future of generations to return again to the value of family, blessed by those called and given the mission by God.

“We are blessed to know that God gave a call to a young man [Rev. Moon] years ago to represent the true intent of God in the years that are ahead of us now. That’s what I have found in the Rev. Dr. Sun Myung Moon. That is why [my wife] Maria and I, on October 10, 2010, participated in the sacredness in the call of God for one man and one woman to be Blessed by a man and woman who know the intent of God.”

Rev. Schanker followed Rev. Rouse’s words by clarifying, “As you can understand, from the participation of Dr. and Mrs. Rouse, Father and Mother’s moon vision for the Blessing was never that it be a rite of one religion, a tradition of the Unification faith alone. Beginning in 1992, the Blessing was offered to people of all faiths, and the participation of the world’s faith communities and from people of every race and background began at that time. Perhaps the largest ceremony held in the United States was 1998 in Madison Square Garden. An interfaith choir performed and Blessings were offered and prayers were offered by leaders of many faith traditions, as is the tradition of the Marriage Blessing ceremony.”

Remarks from Dr. Robert Epstein



Psychologist Dr. Robert Epstein explained how love arises in "love marriages" and arranged marriages.

Dr. Robert Epstein then proceeded to show slides that he had presented at a pro-marriage scientific conference organized by the National Council on Family Relations a few months ago.

“I got interested [in the topic of arrange marriages] because of [my own] failed relationships,” he said. “Those aren’t just words – we’re talking about pain. Serious pain. Custody battles and lawyers. Around 2002, I was so fed up with my marriage- and dating experience that I began to look elsewhere for me. At first, it was just for me personally. I began to look at arranged marriages, which are not very well known in this country, and I came up with what at that time seemed like a crazy idea – a love contract.

“I decided that I was going to sign a contract with someone that basically committed us to dating no one else for some period of time and to learning to love each other deliberately. I had no idea what I was doing. But I did know that there are a lot of arranged marriages out there in the world – more than a 100 million – and that at least in some of them, people do learn to love.

“I wrote a one-page editorial about this experiment in *Psychology Today*. I wasn’t asking for volunteers. But from six o’clock next morning to midnight, fellow journalists, producers, literary agents [contacted me]. More than a thousand women from six countries sent me letters proposing themselves as the volunteer to sign the first love contract.

How Love Arises in Arranged Marriages

“Now I’ve complete the second of two studies on this topic looking at how love arises in arranged marriages in 10 different cultures. I was contacted by a Unificationist asking whether I had Unification Church people in the study and sure enough, out of 52 people that we studied now over the years in arranged marriages, 15 are in the Unification Church. That’s 28 percent. That wasn’t deliberate on our part, it just happened to be the case. So I was able to take a look at how the emergence of love in arranged marriages in Unification Church and how it looks versus the emergence of love in other kinds of arranged marriages in other cultures.”

“The question is: can we take control over our love lives? In a previous study, I looked at more than 30 people in arranged marriages and interviewed them in depth. We were trying to figure out how these relationships work, what makes love grow, to what extent can we take control over the love that we feel in an intimate relationship, whether we have to leave it to chance and let it die over time, which is what we tend to do in our culture. We identified 11 unique factors that seem to be contributing to the growth of love in those marriage, and commitment and communication emerged as the two most important factors. Commitment turns out to be extremely important and I can tell you why.

“In the present study, we’re looking at 36 different factors that conceivably contribute to the growth of love. At least half of the world’s marriages are arranged. In India, it may still be as high as 95 percent. Divorce is legal there, but until recently, India had the lowest divorce rate in the world. It is changing, unfortunately, and there are people very concerned about that. Western media is having such an impact there that it’s weakening this age-old institution of arranged marriages. There are some arranged marriages in some cultures that don’t work very well, obviously. I think it’s reasonable to say that love emerges in probably half of arranged marriages around the world.

“There are at least seven studies that have compared the love in love marriages to the love in arranged marriages. Generally speaking, arranged marriages stack up very well against love marriages. A study in India done by Gupta and Singh compared the love in love marriage to the love in arranged marriages. The love in love marriages starts off pretty

high and gradually decreases, mainly because people don't know how to maintain it. They leave it to chance. In arranged marriages, love starts out lower because people don't know each other very well usually, but they're committed to getting to know each other and love increases over time. Five years out, the love [in arranged marriages] is stronger than the love of love marriages and ten years out, the love [in arranged marriages] is twice as strong as love in love marriages.

“The divorce rate here is 50 percent for first marriages, 65 percent for second marriages and for third marriages, even higher – so practice doesn't help us. In Asian and some other cultures, love is seen as something you can build deliberately. There's an Indian proverb that says, 'first comes marriages, then comes love.' If people can be deliberate about strengthening love, can this process be packaged for the west somehow?”

The Importance of Commitment

“In this particular study, I recruited people through networking and these people took a very detailed survey at arrangedmarriagesurvey.com. Eventually you reach this screen where there are 36 different factors and you can indicate whether or not these factors contribute to the growth of love or somehow weaken love in your relationship. Out of the 19 people in the study, individuals on average knew their spouse 14.3 months before there were married, but five of them only knew their spouse a few hours before they were married. In this study, on average, we had a 5.2 on a scale of 1-10 at the time of marriage for how in love the individuals were with their spouses. At the time of the study several years into the marriages, we got up to 9.3.

“The main factors are sacrifice and commitment. Those are factors were identified as contributing to the growth of love. At the extreme opposite end, one factor contributes to the decrease in love – alcohol. Generally speaking, factors that make people feel vulnerable to each other create and strengthen emotional bonds. Commitment is the ultimate expression of vulnerability to a person, and this is what happens in these big marriage ceremonies [the Marriage Blessing]. You're making people vulnerable to each other. But we don't have to wait for that to happen by chance. We can make that happen, we can be vulnerable to each other in all kinds of different ways – in traditional, romantic ways, but also by going on a roller coaster ride with your partner. You could go to a religious service. There are hundreds of things you can do. Based on scientific research and my own research, I have developed more than 30 exercises that people can do to strengthen an emotional bond.

“Unfortunately, commitment is something we're not very good at anymore in this country. This is a serious problem, because commitment is the ultimate expression of vulnerability and it keeps a bond strong. Can we be delivered? Can we take control of our love lives? The answer is yes. What we need to do is work together, the scientists and those in the religious community, to get the message out to the community at large – because this community has lost hope. We need to give them a basis for hope. And we need to give them tools so they can take control over their love lives. This is a way to prevent the destruction of marriage. This also means we could get together with people with whom we are actually suitable. We could actually get together not for passion, but get together with someone who has similar values, similar interests, and build a kind of love that will get stronger and stronger over the years. We can take control over our love lives. Thank you very much and go make some love.”

Remarks from Andrew Love and Uyanga Khuukhnee



First-generation Unificationists Andrew Love and Uyanga Khuukhnee humored the audience with a lighthearted account of their "matching."

First-generation Unificationists Andrew Love and Uyanga Khuukhnee, who met through the recommendations of spiritual advisors and matching supporters within the Unification Church community, then presented their story about their engagement.

Love said, “I'm thirty years old and I come from Toronto Canada, where I studied comedy. I studied it in a school. They actually teach that. Then I took my skills and went to California to present them to the world. I was doing pretty well, but then I met the Unification church and everything turned into something very different from what I imagined. Up until that point, I was a hard-lined atheist who enjoyed picking at God and the people who believed in God.

“When I started to learn about the Divine Principle, it really challenged me to my core and I could not deny the existence of God anymore. I've been a member for three years now and I committed myself to getting to whether there is a God and if there is, what that God is like, and I've been blown away by the resounding 'Yes, there is a God and God is beautiful.' Now I feel that I'm ready to take on a partner. It happened very naturally. There's a tradition that people who are born into this church are matched by their parents, but become my parents are far outside this church or any faith for that matter, I sought the advice from an advisor, a professional.

“Up until that point – I’m sorry to say this – I didn’t even know Mongolia still existed. I thought it was kind of like the Aztecs, that it came and went, like a lost, fallen empire. And now I’m engaged to a Mongolian! Hey, how does that work? God, thank you! I’ve been blown away by what I’ve learned through this experience, about Mongolia, but also myself. She’s taught me so much about myself and I’ve grown a lot just in the past seven months. I’ve gone from being completely ignorant about Mongolians in general to now planning to have many little Genghis Khans running around my house. I couldn’t be more ecstatic. I’m so excited for my future and I just want to thank the Unification Church and True Parents, Rev. and Mrs. Sun Myung Moon, for letting this happen.”

Uyanga Khuukhnee told the participants: “I am 31 years old, and I’m from Mongolia. I joined the Church in 1999 in Mongolia, and for the first 13 years I worked for the Church and non-government organizations. And then, I met this Canadian guy. We’re going to the Marriage Blessing. Today, I’m happy. We can create a healthy and strong family. And also, our backgrounds are totally different. I come from the Asian world and he’s Western. Different language and different culture and different race. Our two families through us will come together and help create a joyful and peaceful world. Thank you.”

According to Rev. Schanker, interreligious, intercultural and international marriages have been a strong emphasis of Father Moon throughout his ministry in order to transcend and break down the barriers of resentment that have divided the family throughout human history. “One of the biggest misunderstandings and least known factors of the marriage Blessing is that Father and Mother Moon don’t want to match the world,” he said. “The idea was never that a distant authority would tell people who to marriage. They sought to establish a tradition where they not only set the example of True Parents but that the ideal of True Parents could be built an inherited by every family. They intended for young people to find their eternal-marriage partner through the loving relationship of their parents, with the parents involved and families coming together to support them. A parent-centered, family-supported process of matching can transform the experience of love and relationships in the United States.”

Remarks from Jan Pearson and Inja Angelino



Second-generation Unificationists Jan Pearson and Inja Angelino testified about their courtship and their excitement to participate in the upcoming Blessing.

Second-generation Unificationists Jan Pearson and Inja Angelino, who will attend the Marriage Blessing at the Manhattan Center on March 23, were the final speakers at the event.

Pearson, 22, originally from Minnesota, began with his experience growing up in the church: “My parents were married in 1982, at Madison Square Garden and because of that, I grew up in this church. It was awesome. I always enjoyed learning about our faith and what we believed in. Because our faith puts an emphasis on family, Inja and I decided to go to our parents and have them heavily involved in our matching processes. Before I ever really spoke to Inja, I gave my parents a list of people I could consider as a spouse. Her name was on the list, and my parents talked to her parents. Instead of us going through a dating process, we had a courtship process after our parents had gotten to know each other. Because of that process, I got to know my parents better, and it helped our relationship as well. I don’t know if you know what it’s like trusting someone to find your husband or wife, but you have to have a lot of faith, and you better trust that person a lot.

“On March 23rd, Inja and I are going to the Blessing. That’s super exciting for many reasons, but one reason in particular is that many of our friends are getting married together with us at the same location. We have those friends to rely on in the future for support and counsel. Also, we’re really excited because our marriage isn’t just based on ourselves. It’s not just my commitment to Inja that allows me to feel we can be successful, but it’s also our commitment to God and our faith.”

Angelino, 21, who is studying nutrition at Montclair University said: “I always felt I could trust my parents to find a husband for me. They were the ones who raised me and they know me better than anyone else. I was always confident that they can find the best person for me, someone who had similar values and a similar vision for my future. A big part of that vision was to create a strong and loving family. It’s been a little over two years but we’re really preparing and we’re really excited for me.”