

A Time for Hope

This year's World Congress of Families V offered encouragement for families, women and children

by Judy Halone



The fifth World Congress of Families (WCF) convened Aug. 10 - 12, 2009 in Amsterdam, Netherlands to strengthen

its message: that life is sacred, every person in the world has value and the natural family of husband, wife and child forms a rich tapestry of love – a love that can strengthen not only the generations of today but also those to come.

Those messages were delivered loud and clear from the Amsterdam REI Congress Centre through its 100 presenters, break-out sessions and paneled discussions to 1,000 participants. Together, the assemblage represented 62 countries and an additional 2,000 participants watching via online video streaming.

The event's underlying purpose, says WCF Communications Director Don Feder, was to "help strengthen the pro-family movement internationally."

"The Congress serves a number of purposes," Mr. Feder said. "It promotes development of pro-family organizations; [provides] a way to network, learn and share from each other and forms a united front from some of the anti-family developments coming from the United Nations and the European Union."

Helping to form that united front were representatives from several religious faiths; international political leaders; civics, ethics and human rights organizations; scholars, musicians and authors.

An eclectic mix of participants might serve as a speed bump in reaching some non-profits' goals, but for the WCF, it only added strength to its mission.

"We think it's one of our strengths because often times, when you look at a pro-family group, you can see what the predominate religion is," he continued.

But it was more than religion at stake for the Congress, and its organizers knew it. At stake were vital international issues facing families today, such as rapidly declining worldwide birthrates (see sidebar); the domino effect upon society when children are deserted by one parent; the growing acceptance of alternative lifestyles; contraceptives, abortion and euthanasia; human trafficking; and the basic needs children have to know they are loved, wanted and that they belong.

Hope for our children

Dr. Janice Crouse, Ph.D., of Concerned Women for America, echoed many participants' sentiments when she stressed that morals and family values should never take a backseat to a society's material desires, as evidenced in her presentation on the Congress's last day, "Children: Our Hope for the Future":

"...When it comes to children, it is not just 'good' to have a mother and father within a committed marriage; it is the very best!" she said. "Children need parents who establish a family, are jointly committed to their children's well-being and give them unconditional love, nurturing, training and discipline. Such parents meet their children's basic needs for emotional connectedness. They provide sound moral and spiritual development that enables them to reach their fullest potential." Structures within families can make "a huge difference in children's well-being," she continued.



Photos courtesy of Howard Center World Congress of Families

Representatives from six nations participate in a panel discussion at the Congress

Photos courtesy of Howard Center World Congress of Families



Attendees of the World Congress of Families V, Amsterdam, Netherlands, Aug. 10-12, 2009

Touching along those lines were such presentations as “The Philosophical Roots of Demographic Winter” by Don Feder, president of Don Feder Associates; “The Natural Family As The Cornerstone of Society,” by Chief Rabbi Binyomin Jacobs, of the Netherlands; “Prodigal Research” by James M. Kushiner, executive director of the Fellowship of St. James; “Threats to the Family from Addiction to Internet Pornography” by Marie-Claire Hernandez, of Mexico, founder of Family and Society; “A Modern Paradigm for Motherhood” by Dorothy Patterson, professor of theology in woman’s studies at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas; and “How Cloning and Stem Cell Research Affect the Family” by Wanda Franz, Ph.D., president of National Right to Life.

Hope for families

In a post-Congress interview with *Canticle Magazine*, Dr. Crouse points out that the biggest threat to traditional families is the “so-called ‘hooking up’ culture that is prevalent today,” she said.

“Young people are buying into the myth that marriage is not necessary or desirable. So they live together instead and then move on when they tire of each other – thus, building up a resistance to bonding and ending up in serial relationships that are devoid of commitment and, ultimately, empty of meaning and fulfillment.”

She applies her Amsterdam message by offering empathy and compassion for single parents who strive to do their very best.

“Single mothers are the first to agree that their job is impossible,” she said. “We all know how wonderful it is to shift the load to someone else for a breather every once in awhile; we all know the relief of having someone help shoulder burdens and responsibilities.

“Being frank with your children about your respect for traditional families is the key to teaching [them] the importance of having both a mother and a father. Praising your own father and involving him in the life of your children will benefit your children immensely. Children ‘catch’ attitudes – they don’t miss much – and they will absorb your attitudes and beliefs if you are open, honest and respectful with them.”

Hope for the message

While many of us may not have attended the WCF-V, we can still spread the merits of pro-family values by sharing our faith in practical ways, especially with single parents.

“We can volunteer to treat the children of single moms to activities or events,” she encourages. “Not only will the child enjoy the attention and the event, but he or she will have the opportunity to see routine family interactions.

“Just being a friend of a single mother, so that she has someone to lean on, is very important. Being a Sunday school teacher or a volunteer at school provides ample opportunity to build into the lives of children who miss out on everyday life with their fathers. For the mothers, inviting her over for tea and becoming a friend is the best thing that you can do.”

Looking ahead

Plans are underway for World Congress of Families VI in 2011. Women who are interested in getting involved may submit a letter of intent and proposals to the International Selection Committee, Mr. Feder says.

More information and online presentations from WCF-V are available at www.worldcongress.org.

Judy Halone is blessed to be a wife, mother and grandma and writes a weekly newspaper column from her home in Washington.

