

Report on the First Sermon Practice Seminar

Gafrenz/Austria, 14-16 October 2016



The Education Department of the FFWPU Austria held in cooperation with the young Assistant Pastors of Vienna, Graz and Linz the first Sermon Practice Seminar on the weekend from the 14th to the 16th October at the FFWPU retreat site in Gafrenz, Upper Austria. The seminar's motto, "Be the voice of Heaven", inspired 24 participants, ranging from the ages 16 to 60+, to become a channel of Heavenly Parent's love and to let the Word of God flow as clear and purifying water. The idea of this seminar was to offer brothers and sisters the opportunity to learn from professional preachers and presenters, to receive internal and external guidance on how to prepare an uplifting sermon and generally how to make an effective public appearance as a speaker.

On Saturday morning, the community leader of the FFWPU Vienna and vice-president of our national movement, Rev. Elisabeth Cook, explained about some historical aspects of sermonizing and the traditional objective of a sermon which is known as *catharsis* or inner purification. In our communities, a sermon encompasses three basic purposes: (1) to convey the latest providential news, (2) to share testimonials from the local mission work and Tribal Messiah activities, and (3) to offer weekly inspiration, she explained. Rev. Cook encouraged our old and young members to give a sermon in front of the community as an offering before Heaven.

The next speaker, Rev. Heinz Krcek, has had 25 years of experience as a Catholic priest, youth educator and student pastor. He had lived several years in a monastery before he met the Unification Church in the late 1970s. Rev. Krcek spoke about various occasions other than Sunday services where a sermon might be appropriate to give, such as funerals, births, weddings or Blessing ceremonies. He then reflected about how to prepare internally for a sermon and how to find the right topic. "What nobody else knows except you, is how God has been working in YOUR life", he said and encouraged the audience to share their personal experiences with God. Rev. Krcek shared about the power of the word and about *homiletics*, the classical notion for the art of preaching. We should always consider that a

sermon consists of two aspects, the “force of language” (content) and the “form of language” (style of expression), he said.

In a final lecture, Rev. Krcek delivered a model sermon on the words of Jesus, “You are the salt of the earth.” (Mt 5,13) and commented on the structure, message and style of his presentation. “Without salt, life cannot be sweet”, he quoted Pope Francis. Just as salt consists of Na⁺ and Cl⁻, positive and negative ions, we should all emulate the dual characteristics of True Parents and make a difference in this world, Rev. Krcek said. He ended his lecture by stating that as salt has the purpose of purifying food, we should become the salt that purifies society.

In the afternoon, participants received time to prepare a short sermon that they would then deliver in their respective teams. The sermonizers then each received feedback from their team members based on the five criteria (1) content, (2) structure, (3) spiritual power, (4) delivery and technique, and (5) interaction. On Sunday morning, the participants had the chance to either improve on their first short sermon or choose a second topic. Before lunch, representatives of each team delivered their sermons in front of the plenum and gave enthusiastic talks about “sincerity”, “the liberation of Heavenly Parents”, “experiencing God through one’s grandma” and about “the force of the Word of God”.

In the mornings, *Hoondok*-excerpts were read from the *Cheon Seong Gyeong* on True Father’s explanations about giving sermons that move people’s hearts.

At the graduation ceremony in the afternoon of Sunday, the national leader of the FFWPU Austria, Rev. Peter Zoehrer, shared about his experiences of preaching in black churches when he was city leader of London/UK in the 1980s. He also emphasized that we should learn how to mobilize the patriots, saints and sages when speaking in public.



Here are some personal reflections by the participants:

“I gained most from the short sermons we gave in our teams. (...) It was a great experience to see how the team members improved from one day to the other. One member of our team had a really hard time giving her sermon and almost wanted to give up. But through our support she could overcome and finally give a good sermon. This experience really gave our team a real sense of achievement. (...) I definitely want to use my voice for the sake of God. I would like to learn how to give sermons, but also use this skill for everyday life in order to talk in a way that brings light and life to other people.” – Akio F.

“After the movie *King’s speech* [that we watched on Saturday evening] I had a very deep prayer. I would like to continue to cultivate this spirit of full, active prayer.” – Bogdan P.

„I was really impressed to see how well the whole team could preach, especially the 16 year olds in my team. I felt that they had so much power and such a pure heart. Even the idea for them to come to a preachers workshop was quite inspiring for me.” – Jenny B.

“My highlight at this seminar was the high quality of sermons that our younger generation delivered. I could sense their enthusiasm which captivated the audience. God’s good spirit and His love could be felt all throughout the seminar. I hope that our young people can continue to develop their potential and bring about the change in our society that is so urgently needed.” – Gaby Z.

„In these three days I suddenly felt a deep interest and joy about preaching.“ – Marija F.

„My best experience was when I gave my sermon and felt that God was with me.“ – Peter W.

„This seminar was perfectly organized. Super spirit. God is happy!” – Mona Sch.



