

Jack Corley Chair of UPF - UK

Robin Marsh
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Respected Lord King, Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen: It is an honour to have this opportunity to share some thoughts on the issue under discussion at this prestigious venue.

As you know, the topic for discussion is *Family and Gangs*. At first glance, you might think there could not possibly be any connection between those two. In fact, you might say that nothing could be more opposite than family and gangs. And yet, if we ask ourselves why a young person would want to join a gang, we may find many are motivated by a desire to experience some things that they feel are missing from their lives – the kinds of things that only a family can provide.

Here are some examples of why a person may join a gang:

Some are looking for a sense of respect and self-esteem. Some find a feeling of caring and attention in a gang. It becomes almost a family to them. Some want to make money -- to help out at home or to have nice clothes, etc. Some grow up in a neighborhood where it is almost a way of life. Most have some real or imagined problem at home that makes them prefer the streets.

The greatest percentage of gang members come from broken homes. With increasing numbers of single-parent families and the growing poverty levels associated with that, it should come as no surprise that some young men and women seek fulfillment outside their family. This is not to suggest that gang members come exclusively from broken homes or single-parent backgrounds – there are numerous examples of young people abandoning a loving family environment to pursue a gangland lifestyle. The fact remains, however, that the vast majority of gang members have emerged from areas of society in which the rate of family breakdown is highest.

Speaking on a visit to families made homeless by the riots last August, His Royal Highness the Prince of Wales said, “I still think half the problem is that people join gangs because it’s a cry for help. They are looking for a framework, a sense of belonging and meaning.”

One of the major concerns of Dr. Sun Myung Moon, the founder of the Universal Peace Federation, is the strengthening of marriage and the family, thereby encouraging young people to pursue values that

develop good character and discouraging anti-social and self-destructive behaviour.

How does one develop the qualities of good character? We at the Universal Peace Federation believe that the family is a “school of love and ethics” and the foundation stone of a peaceful society. The most basic elements of good character are to be found in a loving and supportive family environment.

As a young person grows through life, his or her character is fundamentally shaped by the relationships experienced within the family. A person who, as a child, receives the unconditional love of parents is more likely to develop into an adult who has a healthy level of trust and respect toward elders. Relating with brothers and sisters teaches a young person invaluable lessons in relating with peers -- how to share and be thoughtful and have a sense of fair play. In marriage, fidelity and commitment are the most important qualities needed, whereas in parenting, the ability to love unconditionally is essential.

The family experience equips an individual with the values and virtues that form the basis of good social ethics. In other words, a happy and healthy family is the foundation for peace. Sir Winston Churchill once said: *There is no doubt that it is around the family and the home that all the greatest virtues, the most dominating virtues of human society, are created, strengthened and maintained.*

When an individual enters into society with the background of a loving and supportive family, he or she is best equipped to build harmonious relationships, which are essential to success on every level. First of all, a person with a heart of love possesses a healthy degree of self-esteem, which is important when relating to others. Based on his or her experience within the family, the individual is capable of feeling respect for superiors, loving care toward subordinates and loyalty toward peers. In other words, he or she is well suited to be part of a team and making a success of their life.

The sad reality, however, is that many young people are denied the experience of a loving family, due to the breakdown in many countries of a family culture. It is my contention that if we are to speak about social peace and harmony, it is necessary to look at the state of the modern family from which we all come. If we can strengthen the family as the basis of society, I believe we can ensure a more peaceful society and world.

In an effort to promote just such a value system, my colleagues and I worked for over 15 years in the former Soviet region and the People’s Republic of China. We developed character education curricula and materials to help young people understand their value as well as to appreciate the importance of caring for others. We taught the importance of a relationship with the environment, encouraging students to consider the natural world as a gift from our Creator and instilling in them a sense of responsibility to leave the world a better place for their descendants.

I do believe that if we show, by instruction as well as by example, good models of character and healthy families, our future generations will be the beneficiaries of the decisions we make today.

Thank you very much for your kind attention.