

## UPF and FFWPU UK Interfaith Marriage Blessing - Celebrating Marriage, Family and Faith

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### Key Takeaways



#### Marriage and family matter for peace

The event affirmed that strong marriages and loving families are not only personal blessings, but also essential foundations for peaceful communities and societies.

#### Interfaith wisdom strengthens family life

With contributions from Jain, Christian and other faith perspectives, the programme showed how spiritual traditions offer shared wisdom on love, commitment and family harmony.

#### The blessing ceremony offered renewal

Couples renewed vows, shared prayers and took part in symbolic acts of forgiveness and rededication, making the celebration both joyful

and deeply meaningful.

### Celebrating Marriage, Family and Faith

We were delighted to host our Celebration of Marriage, Family and Faith, together with the Family Federation for World Peace and Unification ([FFWPU](#)) - UK, North of the Thames Community, for a joyful and meaningful afternoon of fellowship, reflection, and blessing. We welcomed couples, families, faith leaders and guests to the annual Celebration of Marriage, Family and Faith, a joyful and reflective gathering that affirmed the importance of marriage, family values and spiritual life in building peaceful communities. Opening the event, Robin Marsh, Secretary General of Universal Peace Federation ([UPF](#)) - UK, said the purpose was not only to celebrate marriage, family and faith, but also to recognise what strengthens family life in practice: the advice, wisdom and lived experience that help families thrive.

#### An Invocation from the Jain Tradition

The programme began with an invocation from Mrs Datta Shah of the Jain community, who offered a prayer rooted in Jain spiritual tradition. She explained that the prayer honours enlightened souls, teachers and guides who have overcome inner obstacles such as greed and anger, and who show humanity the path to higher life. Her contribution set a deeply respectful tone for the afternoon and reflected the interfaith spirit of the event.

#### A Blessing for the World: Rev. Dr. David Hanna's Reflection

The keynote presentation was given by Rev. Dr. David Hanna, a longstanding presenter on the [Principles of Peace](#) and a former UPF Northern Region President. Speaking on the theme "A Blessing for the World," he reflected on the role of marriage and family in the wider pursuit of peace. He included in this the wider context of [humanity as one family loved by God](#).

Rev. Dr. Hanna began by noting that UPF is a non-confessional organisation that welcomes people of all faiths and also conscientious people of no particular faith. He emphasised that the desire to build peace, strengthen community and seek common values brings people together across backgrounds.

He then explored how the world's major faith traditions have long recognised the importance of marriage ceremonies and family life. Drawing examples from Jewish, Muslim, Hindu, Sikh and Christian traditions, he showed how marriage has historically been understood not merely as a private arrangement

between two individuals, but as a sacred commitment involving family, community and spiritual responsibility.

"The family is the first school of love, where we learn the habits of heart that later shape society."

Rev. Dr. David Hanna  
Former North Region, Universal Peace Federation President

### **Family as the Foundation for Peace**

From youth leadership programmes to forums on peace, conscience, family, and cooperation, our work depends on people who want to stay informed and involved. A central message of the presentation was that the family is the most fundamental building block of peace. Rev. Dr. Hanna explained that strong societies are not built only through laws, politics or treaties, but through the cultivation of integrity, love, responsibility and mutual respect in the home.

He described the family as a "school of love," where human beings first learn the different dimensions of heart: the love of children, siblings, spouses and parents. These relationships, he said, form the basis for how people later relate to the wider world. If love, fidelity, selflessness and moral responsibility are nurtured in family life, those same qualities can extend outward into the community and society.

He also stressed that peace begins with the individual, continues through marriage and family, and then shapes humanity's relationship with the wider world and with nature. In this way, family life is directly connected to the search for lasting peace.

### **The Meaning of True Love and the Marriage Blessing**

Rev. Dr. Hanna reflected on the difference between self-centred love and what he described as true love: a deep and selfless love that seeks the wellbeing and happiness of the other. Drawing on religious teaching and insights from psychology, he argued that true love is not based on what one receives, but on living for the sake of others.

He explained that this understanding lies behind the Marriage Blessing tradition developed by [Rev. Dr. Sun Myung Moon](#) and [Dr Hak Ja Han Moon](#), which seeks to renew marriage as a sacred covenant centred on faithfulness, purity, mutual respect and a commitment to family life.

Tracing the history of the movement, he referred to large-scale international blessing ceremonies involving couples from many cultures, religions and nations, including events held with interfaith participation and even celebrations connected with the United Nations. He also pointed to examples closer to home, including interfaith blessing programmes in Birmingham, showing that these values can be celebrated in practical and locally rooted ways.

### **An Interfaith Marriage Blessing Ceremony**

The next part of the afternoon was led by a FFWPU - UK Pastor couple for the North of the Thames Community, Rev. William and Ruth Haines, who guided participants through an interfaith marriage blessing ceremony. In their opening prayer, they gave thanks for the opportunity to renew the blessing of marriage among couples from a range of different faiths and backgrounds, while also praying for those not yet married.

The Haineses spoke warmly about marriage as a holy path of love, commitment and growth. They described it as the joining not only of two people, but of two lineages and two families, and as the foundation of family life in which children are nurtured and love matures through life's joys and trials.

A reading from Khalil Gibran added a poetic dimension to the ceremony, reminding couples of the importance both of togetherness and of honouring one another's individuality.

### **Renewing Vows and Rededicating Family Life**

Several symbolic elements formed part of the blessing ceremony.

First, participants were invited into a moment of purification through the sprinkling of water, representing cleansing, renewal and the sanctifying grace of God.

This was followed by a moving act of mutual repentance and forgiveness. Husbands and wives were invited to say to one another: "I am sorry I have hurt you in many ways, and I promise never to do so again," followed by the response, "I forgive you." This solemn exchange acknowledged both personal shortcomings and the wider historical wounds that have often damaged family life, while affirming a

shared commitment to respect, healing and non-violence.

Couples then took part in the Holy Nectar Ceremony, symbolising the joining of lineages and a new beginning in married life. They also renewed vows to become eternal and faithful couples, to develop a parental heart, to embody the family values within their own faith traditions, and to establish homes in which God may dwell.

During the blessing prayer, couples faced one another and held hands as a sign of unity and rededication. The prayer asked for God's blessing on individuals, couples and families, and called for their love to remain as "a seal upon their hearts and a crown upon their heads."

### **Music, Celebration and Shared Joy**

Following the blessing ceremony, the atmosphere turned to joyful celebration as couples came forward to cut the cake together, marking the occasion in a spirit of unity and shared happiness.

The gathering was then enriched by a song from Julie Dyer, who was introduced as both a gifted singer and a barrister working in family law. Julie shared personally that she and her husband had received the marriage blessing through UPF and had experienced it as a meaningful new chapter in their marriage. She also spoke of the wider encouragement and recognition she had received through UPF's [Ambassador for Peace](#) network.

Her performance, "Friend of the Wounded Heart," brought an emotional and compassionate close to this first part of the afternoon, offering comfort and hope to all those who have experienced difficulty in family or married life.

[Photo Link on Facebook](#)

[Video Link on Youtube](#)

The final part of the Celebration of Marriage, Family and Faith moved from ceremony into reflection, humour, family advice and personal testimony.

After the blessing ceremony, guests watched an extract from Mark Gungor's "Tale of Two Brains", part of his Laugh Your Way to a Better Marriage seminar. The video used humour to explore differences in the way men and women may respond to stress, communication and emotional processing. It created laughter while also opening a practical conversation about understanding one another better in marriage.

This was followed by a talk from Dr Zohra Zaidi, who offered a practical reflection on family life, marriage responsibilities and the importance of raising children well. Speaking from her experience and faith perspective, she emphasised that strong families require commitment, mutual respect, financial responsibility, shared care for children, education, moderation and cooperation between husband and wife. She also warned that family breakdown can contribute to wider social problems, arguing that strengthening family life is essential for strengthening society and the nation.

The programme then moved to the Exemplary Family Awards, recognising two Birmingham-based families. Fatemeh Haji and Masoud Hajian, together with their children, were honoured for the peace and harmony they radiate as a family. In their response, they reflected that peace begins at home through communication, patience, forgiveness, quality time, love and respect.

The second award was presented to Gwendolyn Khan and Tahir Hussain, whose blended and intercultural family life offered another powerful example of commitment, shared values and faith. Gwendolyn spoke honestly about the challenges and blessings of remarriage, blended family life and building unity across cultural and religious backgrounds.

The final reflections from guests added warmth and depth to the afternoon. Participants spoke about the encouragement they received, the value of marriage, the beauty and difficulty of intercultural relationships, and the importance of keeping love alive through patience, communication and effort. One guest from Uganda shared how the testimonies had given him renewed hope for his own marriage across cultures.

Robin Marsh closed this section by reflecting that family is both a place of great blessing and real challenge. He described it as a vital safety net and a place where people learn to keep talking, keep understanding and keep growing for the sake of the whole. The event ended with a renewed appreciation for marriage, family and faith as foundations for personal happiness, community strength and lasting peace.