

## Universal Peace Federation Bridgeport, CT holds a Peace Forum on Marriage

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Bridgeport, CT – The Universal Peace Federation – Connecticut chapter held a peace forum on marriage on Saturday, February 23rd in the pleasant atmosphere of the conference room of the ABCD Building. "This was by far the most challenging forum event that we have organized. The date had to be changed several times due to unforeseen circumstances, but we were determined to host this event before the end of the winter season," confessed Roger Wetherall, the Executive Director. That week also coincided with the end of the public-school winter break and many of our guests, both teachers and parents, were actually travelling during that time. Still, they resolved not to postpone the event and were glad to welcome about 40 participants, including both guests and staff.



The topic lent itself to a lot of interest and criticism alike because over the last few decades, marriage has really come under intense attack. In Connecticut, this is a special issue as it is one of the lowest marriage rates of any state in the US. Nevertheless, the organizers felt that it was important to make a public statement on the importance and benefit of marriage as an institution that not only allows for God's unique blessing and grace to take place but that also forges a deeper commitment for the couple entering into this covenant, and their eventual progeny.

There are many social, economic, legal, spiritual and philosophical issues that need to be considered when dealing with the issue of marriage. The speakers all approached this from a different perspective. Mr. Bill Hawthorn, an executive with the Church of Scientology in CT, shared an interesting, practical formula to foster deeper communication and understanding within a marriage. Mrs. Lynn Walsh, the Director of the UPF Office of the Family, and Mrs. Cheryl Wetzstein, an award-winning journalist on marriage and family issues gave presentations that ranged from practical tips to daunting UN statistics of the adverse affects of non-marriage on children. They also gave some practical steps that we can take to help our families and communities.



Mrs. Wetzstein emphasized the need to re-institutionalize marriage in society. Some of the ways that this can be done are:

Have national conversations about "what marriage is."

Increase the 58% rate of successful first marriages to 75%. Please talk about your own happy marriage. Encourage others to do the same.

Decrease the rate of unwed childbearing from 39.8% to 30% (circa 1990).

Monitor efforts to further change U.S. marriage laws such as Pro-polygamy bills. Marriage age-limit laws (e.g., will it encourage child brides?)

More bioethics oversight and public education about selling/donating sperm and eggs and hiring of surrogate mothers. Children are not commodities.

Create more programs for both premarital and married couples.

As Mr. Greg Breland pointed out, we were struck by how much lawyers and child therapists actually benefit from the scourge of divorce and broken families. As Mr. Breland's further commented, "The need for a spiritual awakening has never been stronger in this country!"

The QandA after each presentation gave a chance for everyone to direct questions and comments to the presenter, and the round table discussions at the end were both engaging and valuable. Some of our younger guests commented on the fact that nowadays, many young people don't entertain the idea of marriage because they financially seem to depend much more on their parents and also because the pursuit of their career becomes predominant in their life. Yet, the rise in cohabitation versus marriage underlines a basic lack of commitment and respect that are fundamental in creating a stable family which indeed is (and always has been) the pillar of a healthy and flourishing society. After all, the family is the School of Love!