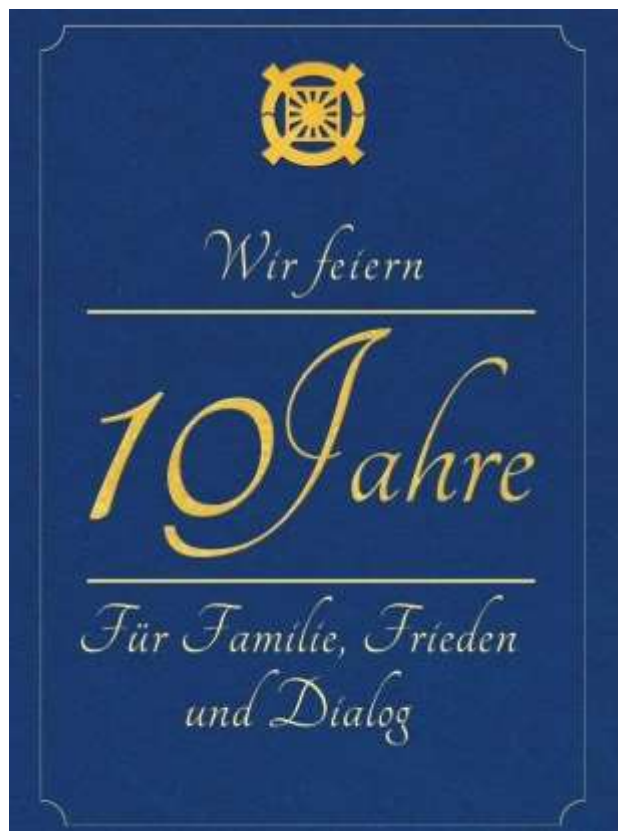


FFWPU Europe and Middle East: Peter Zoehrer on State Recognition Lets Us Help Society

Knut Holdhus
July 9, 2025



Brochure for the [celebration](#) on July 4, 2025, of the 10th anniversary of the official government recognition of the Unification Church in Austria

Emphasis on opportunity to help shape society and realize God's plan for peace at commemoration of 10th anniversary of Unification Church obtaining state recognition in Austria



Peter Zoehrer, President of [Unification Church](#) in Austria, speaking July 4, 2025

10 Years of Recognition Has Enabled Us to "Actively Contribute to the Realization of a Divine Plan for Peace"

Second part (final) of a speech by Peter Zoehrer, President of the [Unification Church](#) of Austria 2015-2025 and President of the [Family Federation for World Peace and Unification](#) in Austria from 2000 to 2017. It was delivered at the [celebration](#) on 4th July 2025, of the 10th anniversary of the official recognition of the Unification Church in Austria. The [event](#) was held at the [Family Federation](#) headquarters in Vienna.

See part 1: [Struggle to Gain State Recognition for Faith](#)

See also: [10 Years of Recognized Contribution to Society](#)

(Continued from [part 1](#))

Our voice counts, our commitment matters

Recognition has opened new doors for us and made it possible to actively help shape our society. We are represented on the Upper Austrian Religious Advisory Council and contribute constructively to projects such as the Interreligious Calendar and the brochure "Faith and Religion". Since 2024, we have participated in the Interreligious Advisory Council of the City of Graz and have been actively involved in organizing events such as the Day of Religions.

We are also present in academia.

A significant milestone was the inclusion of the [Unification Church](#) [German: [Vereinigungskirche](#)] in the standard reference work "Religion in Austria". At this point, I would like to express my deepest respect and thanks to Prof. Dr. Lukas Pokorny, head of the Department of Religious Studies at the University of

Vienna, and his team. Their academic work has been crucial in helping bring the Unification Movement out of the shadow of clichéd images and into a factual, scholarly discourse on an international level - one that is appropriate for a pluralistic society.



Volume 3 of the series "Religion in Austria", Praesens Verlag, 2016, ISBN 978-3-7069-0955-6, 316 pages. The volume contains a 40-page article by Dr. Lukas Pokorny titled "The Unificationist Conversion Narrative: Current Perspectives on Past Experiences in the Austrian Unification Movement"

Our theological compass: One human family under God

At the heart of our faith is a comprehensive image of [God](#): [God](#) as [Father and Mother](#) of all humanity.

This image of [God](#) creates identity beyond origin, gender, or culture. It is a call for unity, brotherhood, and mutual respect. It is the foundation of our deepest longing for a world of peace and harmony.

It is the foundation of our [vision](#): One human family under [God](#). Our founder, Rev. [Sun Myung Moon](#), said:

"True religion begins where people are willing to [live for the sake of others](#)."

This idea shapes our sense of responsibility: We must not passively wait for salvation but actively contribute to the realization of a divine plan for peace.

Dr. [Hak Ja Han](#), who has led our movement for the past thirteen years since the passing of [Rev. Moon](#), put it this way:

"Heaven calls us not only to believe, but to take responsibility for the future of humanity."

International highlights in Vienna

Two major events in Vienna stand as symbols of our path into the heart of society:

The celebration of the 50th anniversary of the Unification Movement in Europe at the Vienna International Center in 2015, where Dr. [Hak Ja Han](#) emphasized the role of the United Nations and called for [God](#) to be included as the source of peace in global peacebuilding efforts.



Hak ja Han, Holy Mother Han, being welcomed in Wiener Stadthalle April 29, 2018 by Werner Fasslabend, Austrian Minister of Defence 1990-2000

And in 2018, the "Peace Starts With Me" mega-rally in the Wiener Stadthalle, featuring powerful gospel music and a speech by Dr. [Hak Ja Han](#) to over 10,000 participants from across Europe.

The core message of this event was: "World peace begins first in the family."

In closing:

Ten years of recognition mean responsibility, commitment, and hope for us.

We thank all those who have walked this path with us - in administration, academia, civil society, and families. We thank all who have understood our vision or were willing to get to know it. And we thank [God](#) for His invisible guidance through visible hearts.

The dream of one human family under [God](#) is not just a vision, but our shared mission. Let us carry this dream forward together - with courage, humility, and unwavering joy.

Following my remarks, Mag. Elisabeth Cook, President of the Austrian [Family Federation for World Peace](#) [German: [Familienföderation](#)], will give you insight into the concrete projects and activities through which we are putting this vision into action. The Austrian [Family Federation](#) is our main organization and executive body, playing a key role in implementing our goals.

Thank you from the bottom of my heart.

See part 1: [Struggle to Gain State Recognition for Faith](#)

See also: [10 Years of Recognized Contribution to Society](#)

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Struggle To Gain State Recognition For Faith

- July 6, 2025
- Knut Holdhus










10th anniversary of Unification Church finally obtaining state recognition in Austria after 50 years in the wilderness, social exclusion and the feeling of not being fully accepted

10 Years of Recognition of the Unification Church in Austria (2015–2025)



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Speakers and distinguished guests at the celebration on 4th July 2025, of the 10th anniversary of the official recognition of the [Unification Church](#) in Austria. Photo: Tony Cook

First part of a speech by **Peter Zoehrer**, President of the [Unification Church](#) of Austria 2015-2025 and President of the [Family Federation for World Peace and Unification](#) in Austria from 2000 to 2017. It was delivered at the [celebration](#) on 4th July 2025, of the **10th anniversary of the official recognition** of the Unification Church in Austria. The [event](#) was held at the [Family Federation](#) headquarters in Vienna.

Zoehrer reports that the [program](#) celebrated not only the legal achievement of being recognized by the authorities but also decades of dedication, faith, and public engagement. The [event](#) was graced by the presence of Dr. Martin Fischer, representative of the Federal Ministry for Arts, Culture, the Civil Service and Sport, who, according to the organizers, delivered an outstanding and thoughtful address. Peter Zoehrer writes that the [celebration](#) was further enriched by the participation of a number of dignitaries from various religious communities, whose support and solidarity gave the event a truly interfaith and inclusive spirit.

See also: [10 Years of Recognized Contribution to Society](#)

See [part 2: "Recognition Lets Us Actively Help Shape Society"](#)

Dear Ministerial Councillor Prof. Dr. Martin Fischer,
Honored representatives of the religious communities,
Ladies and gentlemen,



From the celebration on 4th July 2025, of the 10th anniversary of the official recognition of the [Unification Church](#) in Austria. Photo: Tony Cook

It is a particular honor for me to welcome you here today – on a day that represents much more than just an anniversary for our [faith community](#). Your presence, in the midst of the summer heat and the often-busy vacation season, is a powerful sign of solidarity and understanding. It shows that the experiences and challenges of the past ten years hold relevance far beyond our own community.

Today, we celebrate ten years of state recognition of the [Unification Church \(Vereinigungskirche\)](#) in Austria. A milestone that fills us with deep gratitude, but also with the obligation to reflect and to look ahead with clarity.

On 15th June 2015, our [faith community](#) (German: Gemeinschaft) was officially recognized as a registered religious denomination by the state (German: staatlich eingetragene Bekenntnisgemeinschaft). This act was not merely a formal step, but the result of years of efforts, dialogue, and active contributions to the social life of Austria.

This historic moment marked the end of a long journey – one characterized by idealism, tireless commitment, and a deeply rooted belief in the universal values of [family](#), peace, and dialogue.

As I said at the time – and I quote:

"State recognition was a victory for the rule of law – but also an invitation to make our faith more visible for the benefit of society. Religious freedom is not an end in itself but a mandate to help shape society."

A long road, a firm faith

The path to this day was anything but easy. It was lined with challenges and obstacles, yet always carried by the hope that truth and justice would ultimately prevail.

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I vividly remember the many conversations, the doubts, but also the unwavering determination of our members. There were moments of despair, when the burden of prejudice and misunderstanding seemed almost unbearable. Yet it was in these very moments that we experienced the strength of unity and the significance of our faith.

Anyone who wants to understand our position today must look back to where it all began – with those who courageously laid the first stone.



Paul Werner (1927-2008 – bottom left) and early members of the [Unification Church](#) in Europe. Photo: FFWPU

In 1965, Rev. Paul Werner came to Austria. With tireless dedication and a clear vision, he laid the foundation – with a few companions – for a movement that is now active in the fields of family, education, interreligious dialogue, and peacebuilding. We founded associations, overcame legal barriers, and created new structures – such as the Austrian [Family Federation for World Peace](#) (German: [Familienföderation für Weltfrieden](#)) in 1997. This testifies to our continued commitment to the well-being of society.

At a time when religious freedom in social practice was often reserved for established churches, our recognition process took four years. Four years in which we submitted countless documents, held discussions, and continually demonstrated the value of our community.

This success would not have been possible without the selfless contributions of many. I would especially like to highlight two individuals:

- Dr. Christian Brünner, constitutional law expert at the University of Graz
- Gerlinde Goach, a lawyer from Graz

With their professional expertise, unassailable integrity, and unwavering perseverance, they made a decisive contribution in ensuring that our application stood firm not only legally but was also respected on equal footing. We are sincerely grateful to them. They were without a doubt a “winning team”.

Recognition as liberation

This recognition was far more than a legal act.

For many of us, it was a liberation – especially for our younger generation. For a long time, our youth were often listed as “OB” – without denomination – even though they had a deep faith, a unique religious identity, and a spiritual home in our community. This designation was not just an administrative label – it meant social exclusion and the feeling of not being fully accepted for many young people.

Today, our young people can openly profess their faith – in school, with authorities, and in everyday life. They are part of a recognized religious community. This gives them dignity, self-confidence, and hope for the future.

There has also been a noticeable shift in how religious minorities are portrayed in the media.

For a long time, religious minorities were stigmatized in the media – burdened with clichés and targeted by sensationalist coverage. But even here, much has changed: Today, public debate on religion is more nuanced, respectful, and dialogue-oriented.

We are no longer merely objects of media projection, but subjects in constructive discourse.

Continued in [part 2: “Recognition Lets Us Actively Help Shape](#)

[Society](#)

See also: [10 Years of Recognized Contribution to Society](#)

Featured image above: [Peter Zoehrer speaking in Vienna 4th July 2025](#). Photo: Tony Cook

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