





# TO LIFE!

The Second World Congress on Families:  
Something to Be Joyful For

By Charles D. Cranney,  
Associate Executive Editor

WE HAVE SOME good friends a few blocks away who have 10 children. During their childbearing years, one of the first people they would confide in when expecting their next child was my wife, Andria, who always responded to their news with what I've learned to call "The Holbrook Fuss" (my wife's maiden name being Holbrook). This response is a genuine, unfettered excitement for the good news. It's a thrill with, for, and about life. It's rejoicing the same way Elizabeth rejoiced when she found out Mary was to be the mother of God.

If all of us were better at expressing—and feeling—this jubilation, our friends would come running to us with the good news.

That's why the sounds of the November 1999 Second World Congress on Families in Geneva, Switzerland, are still echoing through my soul. What I experienced there was not just a celebration of life but an accompanying resounding explanation—intellectual fodder, if you will—that supports everything that I've been personally celebrating about my own family of seven children.

It seemed to me that the more than 1,500 delegates of the World Congress—which was co-sponsored by BYU—were a celebratory group of truth seekers, and I felt the warmth of hearth and

ILLUSTRATIONS BY BRIAN KERSHNIK

home there. Though the discourses were sometimes pointed, usually there was still a softness, a peace and tranquility. And the knowledge I gained helped me better understand the solidity and wisdom of the LDS Church's 1995 *A Proclamation to the World: The Family*.

#### FROM ISTANBUL TO GENEVA

The planning and organizing of the Second World Congress on Families involved scores of individuals from BYU; law professor Richard G. Wilkins was a general secretariat of the congress, and other professors and employees devoted time and effort to the event. The congress also featured several speakers from BYU. In addition, among the presenters were Elder Bruce C. Hafen, a member of the Seventy of the LDS Church, Sister Mary Ellen Smoot, president of the Church's Relief Society, and Sister Margaret D. Nadauld, Young Women's president of the Church.

The genesis of BYU's involvement in the World Congress came nearly four years ago when Wilkins attended the United Nations Habitat II Conference in Istanbul, Turkey. There, an unlikely series of events landed Wilkins in a prime speaking slot. The reaction to his speech reversed the strong antifamily tide of the conference, which resulted in a pro-family document ratified by conference delegates. (For the detailed story, see "A Fiddler on the U.N. Roof" at <http://advance.byu.edu/law/istanbul.html>.) It was there that Wilkins began making connections and drafting documents with pro-family groups and governments throughout the world. And it was there that he became convinced of the need for more pro-family voices in the arena of international legislation, where increasingly big decisions are made far from the eyes and ears of those they affect.

On returning to Provo, Wilkins and the J. Reuben Clark Law School teamed with the David M. Kennedy Center for International Studies and the School of Family Life to create NGO Family Voice, a nongovernmental organization

(NGO) recognized by the U.N. The purpose of the organization was to add a pro-family group to the thousands of NGOs that lobby to influence U.N. delegates. In 1999 NGO Family Voice became the World Family Policy Center.

After Habitat II Wilkins found himself and others from BYU taking trips around the globe to Kenya, Switzerland, Prague, and the U.N. headquarters in New York, to name a few. If Habitat II was, as Wilkins has said, "the legal equivalent of the parting of the Red Sea," the intervening years have been the equivalent of traveling in the Sinai desert. Yet during that journey, Wilkins and his BYU colleagues have had brief stops at pro-family oases here and there, gathering support from around the globe. In the process they connected with the Howard Center, which sponsored the First World Congress on Families in Prague in 1997, and BYU became a co-sponsor of the second. The Second World Congress on Families, then, was a culmination and joining of all that effort and similar efforts of other organizations worldwide.

Coming from 45 countries, the Second World Congress delegates were a unique mingling of pro-family Catholics, Orthodox Jews, Protestants, Muslims, Mormons, and academicians. And although pro-family NGOs were few until recent years, representatives from 256 such organizations were in attendance. Many of these congregations and groups struggle with their own schismatic, internal wars over family issues. That's why it was so impressive that the congress delegates unanimously passed the Statement of Principles, a succinct conference summary hammered out by a congress committee (see "Statement of Principles," p. 49).

At the same time a remarkable youth group of 100 came up with their own statement (see [http://www.worldcongress.org/gen99\\_youth.htm](http://www.worldcongress.org/gen99_youth.htm)). These two documents, combined with A Call from the Families of the World (now signed by nearly a half million people; see <http://www.worldcongress.org> to add your name), will be distributed to the U.N.

and all concerned parties internationally, starting at the August 2000 U.N. Millennium Forum in New York.

In Geneva, the beautiful, wood-paneled U.N. Palais was the site of the opening plenary session of the Second World Congress on Families. The location was chosen because it is where many U.N. policies toward the family are formed. There, Allan Carlson, president of the Howard Center for the Family, detailed the U.N. 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which promotes the natural family. Carlson said one major congress goal was to ensure that "ideological corruptions" of family policies do not replace the original pro-family U.N. declarations.

Richard Wilkins, in his address at the Palais, called for governments "on the eve of the new millennium" to return to basic truths about the family, "truths that have been recognized for centuries and reaffirmed in modern times."

The congress sessions seemed to be just that—a dedicated discussion of basic truths and a challenge to many ideologies that have been creeping into our legal and moral systems. The World Congress addressed myriad topics such as U.N. declarations on the family; the power of the home economy (see "Family Work" on p. 24 in this issue); child abuse; home education; gender; the role of the family in Christianity, Islam, and Judaism; helping families in need; depopulation; sex education; and nurturing. (Several of these talks are available on the Internet [<http://www.worldcongress.org>].)

#### TO MULTIPLY AND REPLENISH

Rev. John Njue, a bishop of the Catholic diocese in Embu, Kenya, gave a poignant opening keynote address, beginning a population dialogue that reverberated throughout the conference.

Njue detailed how "powerful NGOs push abortion on poor women as if the destruction of the unborn will emancipate them." Also, he said, "the AIDS epidemic is decimating the peoples of Africa," which has happened because

“NGOs backed with Western money undermine morals of youth by the widespread and reckless distribution of condoms. Attempts to slow the epidemic by the one sure way that works—abstinence and self-control—are met with stony indifference or derisive laughter.”

Summarizing, Bishop Njue said, “between AIDS and population control, a giant continent, Africa, is being slowly but surely emptied. We may never recover.”

Those words, *we may never recover*, have been haunting me ever since. Could it be true? Have I been deceived? What about the only-weeks-old messages the media sent out with such doom and gloom about the “six billion and growing” population?

The words of Senator Francisco S. Tatad from the Philippines helped me approach population with a gracious, pro-family perspective: “I wondered why, among the world’s richest countries, that great event of having six billion souls on God’s planet was being greeted with such gloom, alarm, and panic instead of being celebrated. . . . Was it not more proof of God’s providence that despite wars, disasters, disease, contraception, sterilization, abortion, and nonstop efforts everywhere to undermine the family, the Good Lord continues to sustain it abundantly as the cradle of human life? Did not the gentle Gandhi remind us that the world had enough for everyone’s need, although not enough for one man’s greed?”

Exploding the myth generated by the population-boom media blitz of last October, ample presentations at the congress showed that “the true population problem is depopulation, not overpopulation” (Statement of Principles, World Congress).

Nicholas Eberstadt from the Harvard University Center for Population and Development Studies said, “The population has increased this century not because people started breeding like rabbits, but because we have stopped dying like flies.” In his presentation, after detailing the phenomenal increases in longevity, Eberstadt itemized the

declining fertility rates. For example, according to the U.N.’s *World Population Prospects: The 1998 Revision*, even the populous India has had a 45-percent decline in its fertility rate the last 25 years and is currently at 3.1 total fertility rate (TFR). (TFR is a measure of average births per woman per lifetime.) Thailand and China have dropped 72 and 70 percent, respectively, in the last 25 years and have subreplacement fertility.



“The natural family provides the optimal environment for the healthy development of children.” —STATEMENT OF PRINCIPLES

Now, nearly 44 percent of the countries in the world have a subreplacement fertility rate (below 2.1 TFR). What does this portend? Eberstadt suggests that if the current trends continue, the majority of children in the world will have no aunts, uncles, or cousins, and even three out of every five would have no blood siblings.

Such details have since caused me to wonder how I would have done without my extended family. Several presenters at the congress suggested that the social implications of no extended family could be catastrophic.

For example, Cardinal Lopez Trujillo, president of the Pontifical Council for the Family at the Vatican, indicated that China is beginning to reap the consequences of its enforced population control and has recently changed its policy from one child per couple to two.

The dramatic change in society is starting to happen in other areas of the globe as well. Bruno de Kalbermatten, a European businessman and economist, suggested that in 2025 there could likely be half the number of children in Europe that there were in 1970. One French demographer, Pierre Chaunu, has referred to the catastrophic depopulation as the “white plague.” The affliction goes on quietly. Though people don’t see a never-ending trail of funeral processions, the effect is the same as the black plague.

Another element of the discussion was the rapid aging of the world’s population. “The [number] of older people will be approximately three times that of the younger generation,” says Kalbermatten. This would create a tremendous change in the pension burden, with a diminished young population supporting a large aged population. At the World Congress on Families, similar figures were stated repeatedly by scholars from around the

world, including Viktor Medkov, a sociology professor and demographic and fertility expert at Russia’s Moscow Lomonosov State University. “In the next 50 years, the population of Russia will continue to decline, decreasing between 80 and 120 million people,” he said. “This will create a social catastrophe in Russia. One quarter of the people are already of pension age.”

As the depopulation specter comes into our view, delegates suggested that perhaps an even more disturbing trend is the decline of morality those population-control policies foist on the world.



“Parents uniquely possess the authority and responsibility to direct the upbringing and education of their children.” —STATEMENT OF PRINCIPLES

Margaret Ogala, M.D., a reasoned, compassionate voice from Kenya, detailed how the policies are destroying the cultural defenses innate in African culture:

*Primitive peoples living close to nature mostly believed in a triple human presence in the world, for example that: (1) the living dead, including dead ancestors who lived in the spirit world, but who retained an interest and a certain amount of power over the living; (2) the living, whose duty it was to keep alive the memory of the dead and to appease their spirits, as well as transmit life to the unborn; (3) the unborn, whose well-being depended on the behavior of the living...*

*A child born out of wedlock was... removed from the three presences: the living dead, the living, and the yet to be born. Who could one say were his ancestors? Who would be the ancestors of his children?*

So, besides having no aunts, no uncles, no cousins, there often are no fathers. As I pondered that searing thought, I was left to wonder, “How can the children’s hearts turn to the fathers when they know no fathers?”

Furthering the morality discussion Senator Tatad gave an impassioned

oratory against the evils of abortion: “The war on population and the family is the most savage and brutal war ever waged by the greatest powers on earth against the weakest and most innocent of all God’s creatures. From the sheer number of its victims alone, which now exceed the number of those killed in all the great wars, what we are witnessing today is nothing less than the Third World War, undeclared and unacknowledged by the great powers, and without regard to the Geneva conventions.”

As I’ve pondered the demographics of depopulation and its moral implications, I’ve marveled at the timeliness and wisdom of the Church’s proclamation: “We declare that God’s commandment for His children to multiply and replenish the earth remains in force.”

#### WHOLENESS AND THE HUMAN HEART

As I talked with several LDS mothers who attended the conference, they indicated the congress helped them feel re-empowered in their role as the heart of the home. They savored a reaffirmation of the family proclamation’s emphasis that “mothers are primarily responsible for the nurture of their

children.” One such reaffirmation came from Christine de Vollmer of Venezuela, president of the Latin American Alliance for the Family, who spoke with the eloquence of a poet about mothers and parents, hearts and minds. Her comments drew support from the work of Allan N. Schore, an assistant clinical professor in the Department of Psychiatry and Biobehavioral Sciences at the UCLA School of Medicine.

“For us who are concerned with wholeness and the human heart,” she said, “this work is of vital importance because in this age of facts, dominated by sensation, we require solid knowledge in order to steer a straight path towards the health and wholeness of our families.”

Drawing from extensive neurological research compiled by Schore in his book *Affect Regulation and the Origin of the Self*, Vollmer said:

*Outstanding in these brain studies is the importance of the mutual gaze of mother and baby. This interaction, which every mother... will recognize immediately and which makes a baby so time-consuming, is now discovered by science to be more than simply the intense enjoyment derived by mothers and babies from the hours of eye contact that they have each day while feeding, changing, gurgling at each other, or just gazing. What is actually happening is the mutual gaze is forming, building, arousing, exciting, imprinting the baby’s brain and causing him or her to physically develop the in-born potential to be a happy, balanced, self-aware, and self-confident individual.*

*Mutual gaz[ing] with a series of caregivers will not have the same effect... Other studies in this extraordinary collection explain the neurobiological importance of a great number of other normal activities between mothers and toddlers.*

Madam Vollmer summarized by saying that

*this discovery has, of course, grave implications for our generation of professional mothers but is also a cause for great joy. It promises to return to motherhood*

*the primary and privileged importance which our ancestors gave it from earliest recorded time. Mothers provide the first formation of the human heart. And even more provably of the human brain, that mysterious organ whose electrical-chemical workings and development are increasingly known but whose intuitive capacities remain unfathomable.*

Madam Vollmer has also been at the forefront in Latin America in developing an alternative to its schools' jarring sex education programs. She believes that "sex education has been the most effective vehicle in the 20th century for changing—destroying, if you prefer—concepts and behavior in regard to

relations between the sexes and the functions of family."

Several years ago, she and her colleagues came up with a definition of what sex education should be: "Sex education is all that an individual must learn, from birth, that will prepare him or her to live a happy and permanent life as a couple." With that statement of mission and many years of effort, the alliance has now produced a series of 12 books, entitled *Learning to Cherish*, for students aged 6 to 18. Currently it is being translated into English. Further description can be found in her talk online ([http://worldcongress.org/gen99\\_speakers/gen99\\_vollmer.htm](http://worldcongress.org/gen99_speakers/gen99_vollmer.htm)).

Glen C. Griffin, M.D., an adjunct

professor in BYU's School of Family Life and the editor-in-chief of the school's *Marriage and Families* magazine (see <http://marriageandfamilies.byu.edu>) also berated the inappropriateness of many sex education policies in the United States. He warned of the Sexuality Information Council of the United States (SIECUS), which is "not a government agency, but has become the self-proclaimed authority on sex education in the country." His review of their guidelines revealed, for example, the SIECUS tenet that at age five "children should be taught about the joys of masturbation." And the developmental guidelines, he says, worsen at each stage of childhood.

## STATEMENT OF PRINCIPLES

*The following statement was ratified by the delegates to the Second World Congress on Families on Nov. 17, 1999, in Geneva, Switzerland. A longer version of this statement is available on the Internet ([http://www.worldcongress.org/gen99\\_declaration.htm](http://www.worldcongress.org/gen99_declaration.htm)).*



**OUR PURPOSE:** We assemble in this World Congress, from many national, ethnic, cultural, social, and religious communities, to affirm that the natural human family is established by the Creator and essential to good society.

**SOCIETY:** The natural family is the fundamental social unit, inscribed in human nature, and centered on the voluntary union of a man and a woman in the lifelong covenant of marriage.

**MARRIAGE:** The cornerstone of healthy family life, marriage brings security, contentment, meaning, joy, and spiritual maturity to the man and woman who enter this lifelong covenant with unselfish commitment.

**CHILDREN:** The natural family provides the optimal environment for the healthy development of children.

**SEXUALITY:** The complementary natures of men and women are physically and psychologically self-evident.

**LIFE:** The intrinsic worth, right to life, and sanctity of life of every human person exists throughout the continuum of life, from fertilization until natural death.

**POPULATION:** Human society depends on the renewal of the human population; the true population problem is depopulation, not over-population.

**EDUCATION:** Parents uniquely possess the authority and responsibility to direct the upbringing and education of their children.

**ECONOMY:** Economic policy, both corporate and governmental, should be crafted to allow the family economy to flourish; what is good for families is good for the economy.

**GOVERNMENT:** Government should protect and support the family and not usurp the vital roles it plays in society.

**RELIGION:** Parents have the right to teach their religious and moral beliefs to their children and to raise them according to their religious precepts.

**CALL TO RESPECT THE FAMILY:** We exhort all persons, families, social organizations, and governments throughout the world to respect and uphold the institution of the natural human family, in accordance with the principles of this Statement, for the good of present and future generations.

According to Griffin, SEICUS gives lip service to abstinence-based sex education, which is mentioned only briefly in their curriculum. He suggests that parents ensure their children get an abstinence-only education. Using his experience in the medical sciences, Griffin also discussed the myth of protection afforded by prophylactics, indicating that often those who are supposed to be “protected” contract sexually transmitted diseases.

THOMAS JEFFERSON  
AND PATRICK HENRY

Two highlights of the congress were the consecutive addresses of Elder Bruce Hafen and Rabbi Daniel Lapin, a nationally syndicated radio host and renowned family advocate. (Both talks can be seen on the Internet [http://advance.byu.edu/bym/tolife].) After a rousing standing ovation for both speakers, I heard one nearby delegate comment: “I feel like I’ve just listened to Thomas Jefferson (Bruce Hafen) followed by Patrick Henry (Rabbi Lapin).”

Elder Hafen, a well-published veteran in family law, spoke of the U.N.’s 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC): “I found in a U.N. publications catalog this description of the CRC: ‘A new concept of separate rights for children with the government accepting [the] responsibility of protecting the child from the power of the parents: Hello? Did anyone notice this ‘new concept’ uproots one of the most fundamental natural rights about family life?’”

The United States is only one of two countries (Somalia being the other) that never ratified the CRC. The ratification of such documents is critically important because of the U.S. Constitution’s clause that says, “This Constitution... and all Treaties made... under the Authority of the United States, shall be the supreme Law of the Land; and the Judges in every State shall be bound thereby” (Article VI, clause 2, emphasis added).

Elder Hafen’s comments illustrated the importance of having pro-family voices involved in international policy meetings. “The CRC shows how polit-

ical activists who have lost their arguments in such democratic forums as parliaments and courtrooms have learned to use the U.N. to exploit the naïveté of local governments,” he said. “If the activists can clothe their extremist visions of personal relationships... in the vague but lofty language of international law, they’ve built a Trojan horse that lets them slip like an undetected virus into a country’s legal system and, hence, its culture.”

Elder Hafen’s address then focused on the positive impact of women on entire cultures and how the hostility toward marriage and motherhood damages that impact. He finished with a stirring challenge: “As this World Congress sends a message from the mainstream into Geneva’s [U.N.] headwaters of thought about family policy... it is time to equalize the sexes by asking men once more to follow the moral leadership of women, honoring the equal yoke and lifelong commitments of marriage.”

Rabbi Lapin (the charismatic Patrick Henry of the conference) added an upbeat, sometimes even humorous, view of the forces at work. Lapin broke the family debate into two sides, and he argued that the positions of both are doctrinaire.

“The family destroyers do understand,” he said. “Every tyrannical regime has animosity toward family because the family is a bulwark against tyranny. These regimes believe human society is too important to be left to amateurs—like fathers and mothers!”

According to Lapin, all religions ask three questions. He then posed the questions and galvanized the answers from two opposing sides:

(1) *Where did we come from?*

OUR SIDE: *God put us here.*

THE OTHER SIDE: *By a process of evolution, primordial goo became Bach and Beethoven.*

(2) *Where are we going?*

OUR SIDE: *Toward a great religious redemption.*

THE OTHER SIDE: *An ignominious ending of hopelessness and depression,*

*of Armageddon, of being crowded out of existence, starving to death.*

(3) *What are we supposed to be doing in between?*

OUR SIDE: *Manifesting our faith and belief to our families, societies, and God.*

THE OTHER SIDE: *Do everything possible to stave off the disasters in question number 2. And since people can’t do it, government should.*

TO LIFE!

Each evening World Congress participants were treated to professional family entertainment that highlighted the goals of the congress. After one evening’s performance, Fatemeh Heshemi, a noted Muslim delegate covered in the traditionally modest *abaya*, asked one of her Iranian colleagues to snap a shot of her with Claudia Goodman, the mother of the Goodman family of 12 children, who provided the entertainment that evening.

For me, that gesture highlighted what seemed most important about the conference: an incredibly diverse collection of humanity coming together with an extraordinary, unified resolve to not only protect the natural family but to ensure its prosperity. As the policies and pulses of the World Congress reverberate through the U.N. and throughout the world, they will help provide a bulwark against those whose policies would destroy the fundamental unit of society, the family.

On leaving Geneva, emotionally buoyed and intellectually stimulated, I felt compelled to exclaim, as did Tevya in *Fiddler on the Roof*: “To our agreement. To our prosperity. To good health and happiness. And most important, to life!” □

CREDITS

*Images on pages 44, 47, and 49, courtesy of New Vision Art. “Large Horse Small Riders,” page 48, copyright Intellectual Reserve, Inc.; courtesy of Museum of Church History and Art; used by permission.*