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Traditional Family Championed at World Congress

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The traditional family—father, mother, and children—is in rapid decline, a Church leader warned at the World Congress of Families held in Madrid, Spain, from May 25 through 27, 2012. This trend runs counter to the fact that “children are entitled to birth within the bonds of matrimony, and to be reared by a father and a mother who honor marital vows” (“The Family: A Proclamation to the World,” *Liahona* and *Ensign*, Nov. 2010, 129).

Elder Erich W. Kopischke of the Seventy made these points at the opening plenary session of the congress. He was introduced by Mary Ellen Smoot, former Relief Society general president.

“Even though many people yearn for traditional family life, fewer and fewer have it,” Elder Kopischke lamented in his speech. “During the second half of the last century, annual marriages in Germany declined by more than 40 percent. Too many young people do not marry anymore. Many foster a variety of personal lifestyles,

often driven by fun, freedom, and self-fulfillment.”

The Church leader observed that the “shareholder value” principle of the business world has crept into individual lives and families. He defined that

said. “And that is exactly what happens—family and children are planned and built around career and personal interests. Sometimes children even become a hobby. The objective is to increase the pleasurable



At the World Congress of Families, held in Madrid, Spain, from May 25 through 27, Elder Erich W. Kopischke of the Seventy warned of the negative effects of the decline of family and marriage.

principle as “low investment, quick and high return.”

“The overall credo seems to be: ‘I am willing to marry and even have one or two children if that does not interfere with my career or personal lifestyle,’” he

life for the individual adults.”

Elder Kopischke said the price is high for such a course of action and explained that the attributes that build successful marriages and families—“sacrifice, love, consideration,

commitment, service, patience, endurance, and fidelity”—are often not found in such relationships.

“Small storms, which everyone has to face in life, cause families to fall apart quickly,” he said. “In today’s world, where almost everybody thinks they should be able to get everything they want, people get more and more selfish and less and less content.”

“The decline of the family is not only reflected in fewer marriages and higher divorce rates but also in far fewer children being born,” he observed. “And those newborns who do come into this world are often born out of wedlock and are being raised by single parents. More than 90 percent of these children live with their mothers and miss the influence of their fathers in their lives.”

This has serious consequences for society, he said, including disoriented and rebellious children whose need for belonging drives them to be attracted to organized gangs, which in turn creates a security issue. “Child poverty and lack of educational opportunities for these children are on the rise. Many of them feel they have

nothing positive to look forward to in life,” he said.

Elder Kopischke said the solution includes promoting religious faith. “Not only do we need to rebuild trust in the value of marriage and family but also faith in God,” he said. “Religion plays a vital role when it comes to values, responsibility, and appropriate use of agency, which is our ability to make choices. Therefore, today I want to make a case for marriage and family, based and centered on a belief in God.”

Identifying marriage as part of the Judeo-Christian tradition, he cited Genesis 2:24, the commandment that a husband and wife “shall be one flesh.” He also quoted from “The Family: A Proclamation to the World,” first presented by the Church in September 1995.

“A civilization and society can and will be only as strong as its families,” he said. “A family can and will only be as strong as the marriage on which it is based.”

The World Congress of Families has as its purpose to “stand up for the position of the traditional family, in a time of eroding family life and declining appreciation for families in general.”

Since 1997 the congress has been held in Prague, Czechoslovakia; Geneva, Switzerland; Mexico City, Mexico; Warsaw, Poland; and Amsterdam, Holland. Concurrent with the sessions of the congress, Elder Frerich Görts, former undersecretary of the German federal government and currently the Church’s representative to the European Union institutions, attended the International Parliamentary Forum. The forum gathered the foremost activists and leaders of civic, educational, and research organizations defending the natural family and life as fundamental principles together with government representatives.

While Elder Kopischke was addressing the audience of more than 2,000 delegates at the congress and Elder Görts was engaging with political and civic leaders, Elder Jim Brande and Sister Carol Brande, public affairs missionaries, were managing a booth at the congress with the help of local Church members. The booth featured family home evening and offered a selection of family-related videos visitors could watch about the Church’s support for the traditional family. ■