

Vision and Mission – Union General Congress 8-12 April 2010

The mission to revive our faith and rekindle love – in marriage and family

Monika Urban

My name is Monika Urban, I'm married, mother of five grown children. Like Alois Wittmann I am a member of the UAC in the 'Apostolatskreis Hofstetten'. We come from the diocese of Regensburg, where I work in Catholic adult education for families and parishes, cooperating with priests and lay people.¹ Vincent Pallotti's vision and mission serves as the foundation of my work and gives me the strength to fulfill my tasks. The house of the Pallottines and our circle are sources of strength, inspiration and guidance for our lives in this world with its daily worries. Being responsible for a big family confronted with handicap and illness I continue to experience the word of Jesus: "Don't worry about your life..." (Lk 12, 22 ff) It challenges me to believe that "the Father knows what you need ..." and when we are asked to first look for God's kingdom to consider what is necessary. In spite of my large family, I have felt it essential to collaborate with my parish. At evenings for parents, I was asked to talk about my experience of raising children in the Catholic faith. This became my profession.

Let me share with you what it means to me concretely

1. ...to rekindle love in marriage and family

By loving our partner, in being there for one another and receiving the gift of our children's lives we can sense and experience **God's love**.

For our wedding my husband and I had chosen the word "God be between you and me" (1 Sam 20,42). The words have accompanied us and we found a firm ground in the days of my husband's illness.

I often say at parents' evenings that "God is where your children are with you"² and even couples with little experience in faith agree that love and the growing life of a child are something divine.

Love means: getting involved in another person's life, letting something happen, growing and maturing.

I have learnt this especially during my pregnancies and I have won a new understanding of Mary, the mother of Jesus, who said "May it be done to me as you have said".

Love needs looking after, communication, time for talking and being together.

Coping with different work-schedules, shift-work, different school-holidays and leisure-times, it is often very difficult for families to have time for common meals, but it would be helpful and healing to establish and to practice rituals throughout the liturgical year.

¹ Part time job in the deanery as Pastoral Worker after studying religious education and church-based educational work.

² See Busslinger-Simmen, Mit dem Kleinkind Gott erfahren (Experience God with the Infant), Freiburg 8.1985

To support families in their task I'm organizing 'family-retreat-days' and offer parental-education with biblical and religious themes. "It is good to share the same experiences and to strengthen each other", parents tell me. One recent theme was 'Listening actively'³. Love also means to me to listen to one another.

To accept one another, to let live and to appreciate the other – "Love is a decision"

This word my husband and I learnt at a weekend for couples⁴

I share with brides and grooms at Seminars and invite them also to write love letters to each other.

In the age of SMS this is an unusual but precious experience.

With his theology about creation Vincent Pallotti has shown us great dimensions: The human being as image of God, infinitely loved, appreciated, called and sent.

I happened to read Isaiah 43 "Do not be afraid, I created you and chose you..." on a retreat during my pregnancy with our 5th child. When our child was born with a handicap, these words gave me confidence and strength; we could accept our son with love and experienced much help. –

A proverb which we found: "When your children are little, give them roots, when they have grown up give them wings"⁵ To respect them as they are, accompany them and let them pursue their path. A lifelong learning process for parents.

Love also means to trust, to let somebody go

Thoughts from the programme of the Austrian Pallottines on Vocation⁶ helped and encouraged me: It is in the different talents given to us by God, something of his wonderful image – that vocation can be found.

Our adolescent children didn't know what to do after school and struggled, while my husband and I had our own ideas. During a long talk with my daughter I felt the inspiration to trust in the work of God's Spirit in our child and to believe in her gifts and I started to listen more carefully to what motivated and drove her. I no longer tried to move her in my direction and our conversation became enlightened and a new perspective opened up. Our son said recently, before a difficult examination:

"You must help me to gain self-confidence, then I believe in myself". And while praying once the thought occurred to me: "Don't you think that I love your child more than you can ever love him?" and that we may be allowed to see the fruits of the Spirit (Gal 5,22) which patience and kindness produce.

Love - "Bear each other..." (Col 3,13:) also with our dark sides, illnesses, handicap

On a baby unit, I experienced a lot of love going from the parents to their child, and dedicated caritas⁷ through doctors,

³ From Parent Effectiveness Training, Thomas Gordon.

⁴ Marriage Encounter - weekends for couples and priests; it is one of the new spiritual movements

⁵ Proverb from India

⁶ Berufungcoaching (vocation coaching) by Alexander Kaiser UAC, Vienna

⁷ See also Pope Benedict XVI, Encyclical Letter Deus Caritas est.

nurses, therapists and family members, solidarity in self-help-groups for the disabled. As a faith-filled person I have seen God's love in it. This made me grateful and gave me assurance in difficult times. Sometimes I talked with parents and nurses about my faith. Apostolate on the spot...

To love means also "...as yourself".

St. Vincent's treatment of himself in his particular way of practising the ideal of self-surrender in following Christ in the 19th Century - is the one thing I cannot understand.

Being responsible for my family I have to take care of myself to avoid burning out. I need a place I can retreat to, utilizing supervision and seeking spiritual guidance to find God. Getting older I must use my physical energy economically, delegate tasks and learn to say no.

2. To revitalize faith

You can only pass on faith if you have taken roots in it. A definition of "Credo" is **to take root in God**. *Participants in spiritual exercises in **daily life** like the idea of **God** looking at them during work. "Send up **prayers** while bending over cooking pots, dealing with screaming children and changing nappies", I encourage parents, and to say grace, as it is important to show **gratitude** in a world where we can buy everything and to **care** for God's creation. Among colleagues we have asked: "What can we do to prevent people becoming silent in matters of faith?"*

*When I tell mothers and fathers about everyday life in our family and admit how hard it sometimes is, they often agree, feel understood and tell each other about their experiences. With pictures, symbols, biblical figures and stories⁸ I point out possibilities how to pass on faith to their children **using their senses**. They remember how it was when they were children and become creative.*

Parents come to Church with and for the sake of their children, often after having been absent for a long time. Some contribute in a lively way with their **talents** in 'family-liturgy-teams'.

*They develop ideas in groups, **preparing** First communion. **They must be helped** and members of our Union-circle have been asked to prepare the children for the **sacraments** in their parishes.*

I find myself emotionally touched, when after a long working-day many mothers, fathers, and godparents come to our meeting and listen intently to interpretations of the symbols of confirmation. Where (else) do they hear today: "You are loved, accepted and chosen" in our competitive society?

3. The mission means:

⁸ Inspired by: ‚Ganzheitlich sinnorientierte Pädagogik‘ (holistic or integrated sense orientated pedagogy) by Franz Kett and ‚Regensburger Bibelfiguren‘ (Biblical Figures).

To meet people where they are at, to pass on the gospel and the meaning of the sacraments in a language they speak and understand – the possibility and chance to revive our faith.

People seek refuge and support in times when their lives undergo fundamental changes and begin to discover Rituals⁹ (again). There are so many **rituals of blessing** in our Catholic faith; we can invite families to “*Bless your children when they leave the house!*” *The Schönstatt Family, which is a relative of the Pallottines, regularly invites pregnant women to blessing ceremonies*¹⁰.

It is important to keep good traditions, to strengthen and support the sacrament of marriage and the Christian family, to stand up for their protection as well as to acknowledge the fact that many children grow up in families which have split-up, to ask the question ‘what place do single parents and remarried couples have in the church?’.

There are **new concepts like** ‘Catechesis for families to introduce them into the sacraments’¹¹, ways to adult faith¹², etc. It is a matter of learning to share one’s own life in the search for God.

Would not this be our task and mission in the Union:

placed in the world to share the “grief and pain, their joy and hope” of others¹³

to give reason for the hope that is in us¹⁴

to share how we feel and to strengthen each other in our faith

to work together¹⁵ **with all people of good will,**¹⁶ **to unite forces, to call forth talents.**

“The harvest is big!”

“Many little people in many little places who take many little steps can change the face of the world”¹⁷

⁹ The Benedictine Anselm Grün has many bestselling books.

¹⁰ The Schönstatt family are strengthening Christian marriages and offering training for families.

¹¹ ‘Catechesis familiar’ from South America – introduced in Germany as ‘Familienkatechese’ by Albert Biesinger

¹² Prof. Dr. Hubert Lenz, SAC, Vallendar: ‘Wege Erwachsenen Glaubens’ (Paths of Adult Belief).

¹³ Eucharistic Prayer V c.

¹⁴ Cf. Synod of the German Diocese, 1974; 1 Pt 3:15

¹⁵ Fr. Stanislas. Stawicki, SAC, Vincent Pallotti: Collaboration - The Passion of a Life

¹⁶ Prof. Eugen Biser: In order that the world does not become godless, all of the religions will have to stand together.

¹⁷ Children’s song