

## UPF and FFWPU Nigeria's Peace Road 2018 and Peace Blessing Festivals

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September 23, 2018



As part of activities to commemorate the UN International Day of Peace 2018, UPF Nigeria in collaboration with the Family Federation for World Peace and Unification and the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) chapters in Buruku, Katsina Ala, Logo and Ukum Local Government Areas of Benue state organized the Marriage and Family Peace Blessing Festivals that had 876 couples in attendance and they pledge to become exemplary peaceful couples who will strive to establish peaceful families as foundation for the realization of peaceful communities, states, nation and the world..

The festivals were held between September 20 – 23, 2018 in Adi, Zaki Biam and Buruku communities in Benue state, north central Nigeria that has faced severe violence in the recent past. The family peace festival was a desire fulfilled as most members of the community could gather together again to learn about peace and make individual and collective commitment to living in peace.

On September 20, the festival was held in Adi community and had 68 couples as participants in the peace festival blessing programs while over 200 gathered to participate in the activities to commemorate the UN International Day of Peace in the community. The Adi peace festival featured the marriage peace blessing and Peace Road procession around the community by motorcyclists, married men and women, youth leaders and faith based leaders of Adi community including the Chairman of Christian Association of Nigeria (Buruku LGA chapter), Bishop Isaiah Eglenu Lina and several Christian leaders in the community. After the peace road procession round the community with songs of peace and praises, the participants gathered at the community church hall where they were addressed on the purpose of the Peace Road Initiative and the UN International Day of Peace by UPF Nigeria Secretary General, Dr Raphael Oko and FFWPU Nigeria National Director of Education, Rev Imo Nkanta. After the speeches and interactive session, couples who were registered for family peace blessing stayed for the blessing lectures and ceremony.

The lectures focused on the five steps of the Blessing as well as the UPF peace principles and the four great realms of heart. At the end of the interactive session on the blessing festival, 68 couples participated in the ceremony and completed the three steps as well as began the fourth step of 40 days sexual abstinence for personal renewal and re-commitment. Participants expressed their gratitude to the founders of the UPF and for the members supporting the peace festival activities. Due to the poor turn out of participants, the Christian leaders apologized and pledged to mobilize and register more couples to attend and requested that we should return to the community again on September 23 for the second phase of the Blessing.

On September 21, 2018, the Family Peace Blessing Festival team moved to another community where community leaders were registering couples for the program. We arrived Zaki Biam in Ukum LGA of Benue state and had the festival lectures and ceremonies at the First Baptist Church, Y-Junction in Zaki Biam, Ukum LGA of Benue State. We were welcomed by the Chairman of the Christian Association of Nigeria in the area with the Divisional Police Officer who also provided police officers that served as security men at the event due to the security challenges being faced in the area. After delivering the lectures on the significance of the UN International Day of Peace and the Family Peace Blessing Festival,

112 couples fully participated in the blessing program with majority of them as church and community leaders who also offered to extend the program to their churches and communities. The Divisional Police Officer, traditional ruler of the community and some Christian ministers were presented certificates as Ambassadors for Peace. They were all full of praises for the initiative and pledge to host a bigger event on October 4, 2018. 12 volunteers offered to register more couples to ensure that the Zaki Biam community has 430 couples to form the foundation for a "Peace Tribe" in the area.



The festival team proceeded to the next community of Buruku, the headquarters of Buruku Local Government Area. In Buruku, the couples gathered at the NKST church and many traveled across the Buruku river to attend the festival. After speaking on the UN International Day of Peace and the Family Peace Blessing Festival, 501 couples participated in the blessing program. The hall was filled and over 100 couples had to participate in the blessing under a mango tree close to the hall. Volunteers moved from house to house to mobilize couples to register for the event. The couples were so excited as they arrived the venue and were welcomed by the Blessing staff, supported to take photos together as couples, one couple at a time, got registered by submitting their pre-registration form and were given a seat at the blessing hall.

After the lectures, couples followed each of the steps of the blessing festival and renewed their commitment to each other and to raise up their children to become peaceful citizens. At the end of blessing program, light refreshment is served to all participants and couples are grouped together in teams of 36 couples to work together toward a peaceful community.

Following the large turnout in Buruku community, volunteers offered to reach out and mobilize more couples in their neighboring community to ensure that at least 860 couples participate in the festival to create two peace tribes of 430 couples each around the area.



On Sunday, September 23, the peace festival team returned back to Adi community again as requested. As soon as we arrived in the community, the volunteers began mobilizing the couples that they pre-registered to the venue of the program. As each couple arrives at the venue, festival scarf is provided to them, their participation form is numbered and they move on for the photo session by the photographer

and the registered couple is then taken to the hall for a seat. At our return to the community of Adi, 196 couples registered and participated in the blessing program.

The news of the family peace blessing program is spreading like wild fire and more volunteers are coming forward to mobilize couples in their areas to participate in the festival, which they are fast realizing as the solution to the many challenges they have been facing. Religious and community leaders are reaching out to each other sharing positive testimonies of the family peace festivals and encouraging others to welcome the UPF/FFWPU team to their communities.

In each of the areas that we visited, Chairmen of the Christian Association of Nigeria and their spouses in Buruku, Logo and Katsina-Ala LGAs who have participated in a similar blessing program with their church members between May and August 2018 are fully supporting the program with their presence at each event and sharing testimonies of their experiences as participants and encouraging others to embrace the program. There are increasing requests every day now to extend the family peace festival to other communities in Benue state as well as other neighboring states.

The interest shown by participating couples, religious and community leaders testify to the point that we can bring about a peaceful world by strengthening marriages and building strong families through the family peace festival education programs and ceremonies in local communities. Volunteers in various communities are ready to work with us to bless hundreds of thousands of couples throughout the region and the nation.

