

# Congress Seeks to Strengthen Families Worldwide

✖ In the Netherlands, the first nation to legalize same-sex marriage, a cross-section of religious leaders, scholars and lawmakers from 61 countries are convening this week for an international strategy session to develop ways to strengthen families.

The three-day World Congress of Families V began Monday in Amsterdam, and features a variety of pro-family discussions, from implementing community-based parenting and marriage counseling services to lobbying governments to defend against anti-family laws.

Participants include groups such as Focus on the Family and the Family Research Council, as well as representatives from Baptist, Roman Catholic and Muslim organizations.

“Not everyone here agrees on ... a particular doctrine or tradition in the church, but when we focus on these issues of family and life and what God has ordained in marriage, these things are commonality,” said Larry Jacobs, managing director of the event, which ends Wednesday.

Jacobs says Europe already has seen the effects of not protecting the family unit. He said there has been a decline in the number of children born in recent years, which has caused the labor force to shrink and taxes that support current retirees to diminish.

"We're focusing on materialism and selfishness and not on relationship with family and children," Jacobs said. "People are discovering that they're trying to replace the happiness and joy that they had through family life through other forms of entertainment and discovering that it's not really replacing that lost void in their lives."

Through seminars, panels discussions and question-and-answer sessions the congress hopes to find solutions for faith, government and community leaders to implement in their home nations. Jacobs says the connections attendees make with other pro-family leaders are often the most productive results of the congress.

"God brings people together of like mind, and pretty soon there is action and a new organization that's formed that we couldn't have dreamed up," he told *Charisma*. "[You] come through with some incredible ideas that His people can implement."

The conference is being broadcast live on the World Congress of Families Web site.