

An interview of David and Patricia Earle of Birmingham, Great Britain

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The Earle family

Question: David and Patricia, you could bless 430 couples in the city of Birmingham. Your story as successful tribal messiahs started in the early 1990s with an "inner calling."

David: Patricia and I had been living in the United States for seven years. I had been working for the Ginseng Up and Il Hwa company. We had a nice apartment, a car, a reasonable job and three young daughters. I had applied for a green card [a card granted to foreigners permitted to live and work in the US]. It had just been approved after two years of legal, and somewhat costly, procedures.

Patricia: and I had my home church area in New Jersey, which I'd invested a lot of time into, meeting many wonderful people.

Question: And then what?

David: Everything changed around July 1, 1991, when Father proclaimed the Day of God's Eternal Blessing as part of the hometown providence and tribal messiahship. Patricia and I talked about it as if Father had directly said to all of us, "If you really want to go to your hometown, you should go." Yet, something deep stirred inside both our hearts, and we then made several forty-day prayer conditions to discern if going to my hometown was really God's will for us. There was the green card to think about, and the company was reluctant for us to go back to Europe.

Patricia: We had been thinking about returning at some point, to be closer to our parents, to look after them as they got older, and for our children to get to know them. We had both been disinherited when we joined, and my parents kidnapped me in what was a horrible experience, involving the Catholic Church and ADIF, a deprogramming organization. But we always kept in touch with our parents, and they became a bit more open with the birth of our children and could see that we were happy. Did you return to your original hometown?

David: Not exactly. I was born in a very small village in Lincolnshire, three hours north of Birmingham. I then got a Master's degree in Biochemistry in Leeds, and a PhD in nutrition in Agriculture in Aberdeen, Scotland. By that time, my parents had moved to Birmingham to work in a unique federation of Christian colleges, which also had an interfaith dimension. We decided to make Birmingham our landing site, although we would later make a number of trips back to my birthplace, and Patricia's hometown of Brussels, with our children, to visit relatives there.

Patricia: we came back to the UK with almost nothing, no savings, but I had always had a dream in my heart that we could have a house and invite people into our home. I had done a lot of home church in the USA, and when my father visited us there he met many of our friends, who testified to him about the value of our work. A few months after arriving in Birmingham, an amazing thing happened. My father visited us again, and over the course of a weekend decided to buy us a house! This was the beginning of a dream come true, allowing us to combine our family life and settlement with a public life, outreach and eventually reconciliation with our two families. The launching of the Women's Federation for World Peace in 1992 seems to have played an important role in your early activities.

Patricia: And continuously until today. I became the WFWP representative in the UK Midlands region just after we returned to Europe. A pressing issue in 1993 was conflict in Bosnia and the former Yugoslavia, which generated so much violence, especially against women and children. I hosted a meeting in my home as part of a WFWP forty-day prayer throughout Europe. The conflict began to be resolved after those forty days, so I continued the meetings on a monthly basis, initially for Christian women but then gradually becoming interfaith as they brought their friends from other religious backgrounds. At each meeting, we would have a speaker, time to share together, and then a quiet time of prayer and reflection. Most meetings would also result in some kind of practical action, fundraising, setting up a support group, etc. We have managed to maintain the Women's Peace Meeting for twenty-four years now, as well as developing other activities. We have often had over a hundred women in our home, one time as many as 155, women representing all religions, races, cultures, social status and age—sometimes more than forty different nationalities!

David: As these activities expanded, we had to modify and extend our house to accommodate everyone. We converted a double garage into the main meeting room, later extended it, and also extended our kitchen three times, among other things. All this required money, and Patricia's father helped us a number of times, which is amazing considering what happened when we joined. We've found people like to meet in a home -- it's a neutral venue, but more than that it's possible to create a warm, intimate safe environment for sharing together. We've put in a TV monitor so that people can see in a third room, and occasionally some people have to sit in our dining room where they can hear but can't actually see anything!



Question: That inner calling started to make sense.

David: It was beneficial for everyone. There was a healing effect on Patricia and me. We apologized to our parents for the pain of separation, and they felt the healing at a deep level, including through our children. For our children, too, it was very good because they could get to know their grandparents and have many interactions with them -- so many wonderful memories to carry with them through life, which would affect the way they treat other people, especially elderly people. Our children have not had an easy time, because of our very public life, but they have benefited a lot

from our home becoming a melting pot of all kinds of people. Now that they are all in the caring professions, they have a natural freedom in relating to every kind of person, through this vision, which ultimately came from our True Parents. Our oldest daughter, Theresa, is about to become a qualified Community Doctor (GP), and our second daughter, Katrina, has worked as a pharmacist for five years in a local hospital trust. Natasha, our third daughter, is a physiotherapist in Birmingham's largest hospital, and our son, Jonathan, is working hard to prepare for his fifth and final-year exams in medicine. The standard joke in our family is that they just need two elderly people to look after! Many of us in the first generation gave up our studies to work with our True Parents, so to see our children studying hard and achieving is so rewarding, although in our case we never pushed them towards the caring professions. It just happened by choice. We hope that all those in our second generation can eventually find their calling in life and genuine happiness in what they choose to do.

Question: How did the initial peace meetings develop a more interfaith dimension?

David: It wasn't planned, or rather it evolved naturally, reflecting the development of the providence during the 1990s, with the coming of the Era of Women and the globalization of the blessing. It has also reflected the situation in the world, where inter-religious and multicultural issues have become dominant, especially in a city like Birmingham with its unique demographics.

Patricia: Our Women's Peace Meeting didn't remain Christian, and we began to welcome people of many different backgrounds, often arriving in Birmingham as refugees from nations torn apart by conflict. We encouraged speakers to tell their painful stories, which created empathy, awareness and a sincere desire to do something to help among our group. To hear about peoples' suffering in the media is very different from having a real human being in the same room, sitting next to you and sharing their story. The speakers would prepare their talk, but then the remainder of the meeting would be very spontaneous, including the quiet time of prayer and reflection towards the end, when God's spirit would come down amongst us and we would feel that presence of love, beyond all our differences. This has been one of the main reasons women return to the meetings, bringing a friend, often from another religious background.

David: Britain, and Belgium, formerly had colonies all over the world, and much of the UK today is so multicultural, especially our larger cities like London and Birmingham. The legacy of the Commonwealth is there too, and all this calls us, as Unificationists, to be role players. We have unique, international families, an incredible global worldview, and all the resources to deal with cultural diversity. Historically, Birmingham is one of the cradles of the Industrial Revolution, labeled "the first manufacturing town in the world" in 1791, but when True Mother came here, in May 2000, she told us we have to be the center of the 'Revolution of Heart'. Modern Birmingham has large Polish and Irish communities and, after World War II, became home to large numbers of people from India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and the Caribbean. In recent times, thousands of people have arrived here as refugees and asylum seekers, from Afghanistan, Iraq, Iran, Somalia, Sudan, Congo DRC, Syria... the whole world is here. 57 percent of primary and 52 percent of secondary school children are now from non-white British families! We are only just over 1 million people but there are 161 mosques, sixteen Hindu temples, three synagogues, twelve Sikh gurudwaras, ten Buddhist viharas, as well as all the many churches. There have been tensions, of course, and the area is not immune to radicalization, but there are so many initiatives for peace and examples of good practice here, from religious leaders all the way down to street level. A short time ago, 150 UK

mosques opened their doors to the public. The 'VisitMyMosque' campaign was particularly successful at the mosque which Patricia and I are part of in Birmingham, and the place was jam packed with hundreds of visitors. We are a voice of goodwill, among many others. We have a unique expertise in women's role in interfaith relations, and another in inter-religious marriage. Not only have we held the Interfaith Peace Blessing every year since 2008, but I have been asked to intervene twice in marriages where young men and women from Sikh and Christian background wanted to marry each other. In one case there were actual death threats, and police protection, and I was asked to speak at the marriage ceremony both times to help the families, and communities, better understand one another.



Question: Our True Parents have insisted that tribal messiahship is the cornerstone of Cheon Il Guk. But some members still feel estranged from their relatives, and from the community. How did you build this culture of community outreach? It now seems to be natural for you...

David: Our parents were role models, which helped a lot. We both come from families where the sense of serving your neighbor, and the wider community, was strong. In the village where I grew up, my father and his brother owned the village shop which sold everything to everyone! They were always going the extra mile to help

people. When my parents moved to Birmingham in 1970, they took a job in a unique federation of Christian colleges, where young people came from all over the world to study. Unofficially, they had a pastoral role to look after many of these wonderful young people, making them feel welcome, inviting them for supper in their home, and generally taking them under their wing.

Patricia: My fathers' role in Brussels was more political and social. He had a position as Deputy Mayor (echevin), responsible for education, sport and music in one of the 12 districts in Brussels, so we always had people coming to our home. My mother was very supportive and it was her joy to help my dad, and welcome people into our house. I have a vivid memory of her treating a very poor, humble lady like a queen, getting out our best china and making her a cup of tea. I felt so happy to see my mum doing that with such joy.

David: One other factor is that we have been doing all our work as a couple. We are very different, and very complementary. I am more 'British', diplomatic, and quieter than Patricia. She is more direct, passionate, and natural in reaching out to people. She just can't stop meeting more and more people. She has helped me develop different aspects of my character. On the other hand, she lacks confidence and is self-critical, which sounds like a paradox. I am just the opposite, and am completely confident I can do whatever I set out to do, or whatever God asks me to do. Also, we have never really focused on our personal tribal messiahship, but see our efforts in a much bigger context, for our city and nation, even for Europe. Then we feel we are on such an exciting journey together.

Question: Are you doing only grass roots activities?

David: Grass roots activities build natural credibility with people, as well as having their own value. People can see that we are sincere, and practice what we preach. However, our experience is that when you connect those activities to a bigger plan and vision, you are naturally projected up to higher levels, sometimes in the most mysterious ways. One classic example is Patricia supporting a Sikh women's annual fundraising walk, for several years. After 3 or 4 years, through that, we were able to meet Lord Tarsem King, a member of the British government, and he then became not just an Ambassador for Peace but one of the mainstays of all the amazing work which our colleagues in London have been doing in the UK Parliament since the early 2000s. And he was chosen by True Mother as one of the two people to pay tribute at the time of True Father's Seonghwa in 2012. Lord King actually passed away himself shortly after that.

Patricia: It was the same with our work in India which began in 1998. A small, humble humanitarian project for the upliftment of *Dalit* orphaned children at the bottom of society was recognized, 4 years later, on the national level, receiving an award from a former President and former Prime Minister of India. We were even given 'honorary citizenship' of India to get the award, as it is only given to Indian people (NRI's) living in the diaspora.

Question: How did that actually start?

Patricia: In 1996, we volunteered to go from the UK to attend the national messiah workshop in Chung Pyung. However, we were asked if we would stay in Birmingham to develop the foundation there. We volunteered twice more, when there were not enough candidates, but were again requested to stay in

Birmingham, and finally we decided to remain, feeling that that was where God wanted us to be. Shortly afterwards, we met a Christian Minister from south India, and he invited us to help him develop interfaith work in Andhra Pradesh. The Interfaith Children's Home was born out of our visit there in January 1998. The Women's Peace Group in Birmingham raised all the initial funds to begin building work, with money coming from mosques, temples, churches, synagogues and gurdwaras, really a holy endeavor. David organized an RYS project to dig the foundations of the Home in December 1998. The project has allowed us to really integrate into the Indian and wider Asian community in Birmingham, and beyond.



The Earles collaborated with members in other parts of the movement in the UK in establishing the Interfaith Children's Home for orphans in Hyderabad, India.

Question: Finally, on the foundation of all these years of tribal messiahship, you have been able to bless so many people.

David: It has been so challenging to hold the Blessing consistently since around 2008, and it has had to come from a deep place. Of course it is also very joyful, but the feeling is one of constantly pioneering something, really being on the front line, and requiring a lot of spiritual energy. We genuinely feel this sense, which also comes frequently from True Mother's words, that we have to bless the whole world. And, in a way, we have the whole world here, certainly in many of our west European cities. We've found that when we consistently invest in people, building genuine friendship and trust, then the Blessing is one of the natural consequences. We always try to prepare people well, and give as much education as we can, but the investment of heart is the bottom line. We take responsibility for each couple in front of God, and our commitment to them is long-term, even eternal, so the Blessing is not simply a one-off event. Of course it is, in the sense of the grace received on the foundation of True Parents sacrifice, but after the Blessing we want to continue to bring people into a deeper understanding of the Principle, and to find more joy and happiness in their relationship with God, and in family life.

Patricia: The most recent Blessing in February this year was absolutely amazing. It was as if the floodgates were opening, with the number of people who came, and with leaders of different communities coming and bringing people with them. Somali, Indian, Kashmiri, Bangladeshi, Congolese, Iranian, Polish, Pakistani, Syrian. It was an incredible, joyful experience for our whole FFWPU community, and for our city. The challenge now is to take care of so many wonderful people, and to help them discover the Principle more deeply, learn more about True Parents life and example, feel the depth of meaning behind the Blessing, and then work together to create a more harmonious, peaceful society. In a way, it's just the beginning of a journey and we have so much more to do, so much further to go. We can't really extend our house anymore, but there's always more room for our hearts to grow.