

A Dream Continues... An Interview with Alice Fleisher

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March 14, 2018



Alice Fleisher with her husband, Gary

Alice Fleisher is celebrating her "golden anniversary" as a member of the [Family Federation for World Peace and Unification](#) (FFWPU). Alice has been a member for 50 years.

Back in the fall of 1968 Alice accepted an invitation to dinner from a classmate while attending San Francisco State University. This seemingly small act became the catalyst for a life-changing experience that continues to this day as Alice pursues her dream of pioneering the development of Unification concepts in the realm of social thought in her [Doctor of Ministry](#) (D.Min.) studies at the [UTS campus](#) in upstate New York.

She's now on target to complete what she calls her "legacy mission," the final chapter in a life that began when, as a young girl, she determined her purpose in life was "to come into perfect harmony with God and, further, to help guide other's to reach that same goal ([Bodhisattva](#) mission)." Five decades, three children and four grandchildren (with another one on the way) later, she's closing in on her goal.

"I determined I had to find what I saw as the 'social expression' of God's work," is the way Alice described her long-term goal of her legacy mission. "To do that, I decided I needed to go back to school and settled upon sociology since it was the academic area that encompassed the study of society, and important for me, included the study of social concepts, thought, and theories."

When she chose to go back to school Alice was in already her early 50's, working as an executive secretary, volunteering for the FFWPU, and, "with my husband, Gary, we raised and educated our three children."

In spite of all these responsibilities, she still found the time to take one class per semester for 16 years until she received her Master's degree in Sociology in 2015 from the University of Colorado at Denver, with an emphasis on social theory. Just fulfilling her academic requirements wasn't enough for Alice, however. Her thesis: Four Approaches to Defining Social Capital, is currently in the hands of a publisher and is expected to come out later this year.

After graduating with the master's degree, Alice spent the next 18 months thinking about what her "next step" would be. It was a momentous day when she decided that the next step would be to pursue the D.Min from the Unification Theological Seminary (UTS). Since that time, having attended (UTS) before the school was fully accredited, she has taken the coursework necessary to upgrade her earlier UTS degree to an accredited Master's in Religious Education and also taken the required prerequisites in order for her to apply to the D.Min program.

Her goal now is to kick off the process of investigating the theoretical concepts found in the [Divine Principle](#) and in True Parent's words and to apply them to "real life" issues, problems and concerns in order to facilitate the development of "the theoretical understanding of God's Kingdom in the world"; initially through her pursuit of the D. Min. degree and then beyond.

Question: How will you apply the approach you spoke of to your D.Min studies?

I want to find a way to interface the Divine Principle and the arena of social science, social thought and sociology. My main ministry focus previously had been in the area of the [Blessing and Family Ministry](#) in the FFWPU, but now I feel it's time to transition to my "legacy mission," which targets the arena of the Principle and social thought. This is what' has driven me to come here to the seminary. We're still

working on what my dissertation project will be, but what' is driving me is the commitment I have to interface the realm of "social theory" with the Principle.

Question: How can this type of program be applied to your D.Min studies? What will it encompass?

Through my dissertation project and the work I will be doing after gaining my degree, I will be looking at things like: 'how the introduction of (the assumption of) God can change social thought' 'what are the components,' 'what are the different systems,' 'what will be the substance of such a society.' Of course, the focus of my dissertation project will necessarily be very narrow and can't possibly cover such a broad scope of topics. Rather, I hope through the D.Min program, to set the groundwork as well as provide a catalyst for future research and practice by myself and other scholars also called to work in this arena.

For the classwork component of the D. Min studies, all the courses I have been taking, including prerequisite classes, have proven to be very valuable, even if they don't apply directly to my target area. For example, I had to take a course on "Evangelism and Church Growth," and I'm applying that in my community in Denver, helping to reform our evangelism program, partly due to my input, but there are also many other people involved.

Question: What are your expectations for the Doctor of Ministry program?

I definitely feel called and led to it (D.Min), to what is called the "terminal degree" in ministry. To come here a person has to be pretty clear in terms of knowing what their purpose is, what their direction is, and what the arena they want to work in is. Enrolling in the D. Min program is not an easy decision to make, but once made, UTS offers a perfect environment to apply those interests within a ministerial setting. I also consider my degree pursuit as pivotal step in order to further develop my work on a professional level.

Question: Did you speak with [Dr. Kathy Winings](#) (Director of the D.Min program) before coming here?

Yes, I spoke with her many times. I felt guided to be here, both by her and also by my own intuition. The D. Min program represents, for me, the next necessary next step in my ministry and life path and from there we'll see how it goes. What's inspiring is that each person in my class feels the same way about their calling and their decision to pursue the D. Min degree. Each of us feels that enrolling in this degree represents the end of a long journey and that God has guided us to be here. So, there is an amazing dynamic amongst the students, a very strong conviction that it's not a coincidence that we all got here at the same time, that it's not an accident.

Question: Has the D.Min program lived up to your expectations?

The classmates that I'm working with are all remarkable people, and each of us has our own individual interest and focus and guidance by God. The D.Min. program is so amazing and comprehensive; it's able to encompass such a broad spectrum of callings. I believe it's also important to realize that none of us enrolled in this program haphazardly.

For example, I trained myself as much as I could at the master's level. To take it to the next level - the doctoral program – the D.Min program is the perfect setting for what I need to do. So, yes, the D.Min program has and, I am confident, will continue to live up to my expectations.