

## Leda Project: Pathways to a Sustainable Future Project - Making a Difference

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The ‘Pathways to a Sustainable Future Project’ participants’ first week in Paraguay proved a dynamic one as we engaged in a wide range of interesting experiences. Our opening orientation in Asuncion introduced us to the country, its history and culture and the exciting process of befriending diverse members of our international team. The journey to the Mennonite Settlement in Loma Plata, the long bus and boat rides and especially the four days in Olimpo, afforded us opportunities to substantially render needed services, make new friends and discover aspects of the local culture firsthand.

Our journey’s next leg took us to the Leda Settlement, a place where we hoped to discover something precious about God, the Creation, the Founder and ourselves.

### Arriving in Leda



Sunday evening’s emotional sendoff by the community in Olimpo was followed by our quiet departure for Leda early the next morning. We split up and some boarded boats, while others made the three-hour journey on open trucks. By boat, the trip upstream presented passengers with a panorama of many square miles of undeveloped natural landscape, with only a rare sighting of buildings or people. As the boats rounded one of the countless bends of the river, the Leda Settlement suddenly became visible.

Observers from the boats could easily catch a sense of how different the well-kept settlement of Leda was from anything else in the area. While the Leda Settlement is huge and covers an area larger than Tokyo,

most of the settlers' efforts have focused on about 5% of that area. Our boats pulled up to shore, where local residents greeted us and we then quickly loaded our luggage into two pick-up trucks. The trucks drove us past beautifully constructed building, including a special building made for True Parents, founders of the Leda Project, two guest houses, and the lab facilities where research in aquaculture and food processing takes place. The ride continued as we approached the large main building that houses two conference rooms, dining facilities, dorms and special guest rooms, all set next to an Olympic-size swimming pool (the only one in that area of the country). After settling in our rooms, the volunteers joined the Leda staff for a delicious lunch that included fish, meat, vegetables and fruits that were largely grown or caught on the settlement.

### **Practicing Principle as a Way of Life**



Soon after our arrival, we took a tour of the grounds and received presentations by members of the original pioneer team, Mr. Michihito Sano and Mr. Nakata, who shared firsthand accounts of the history, developments and current activities of the Leda Settlement. We were moved by the powerful testimony of the hardships faced by the pioneers as they made the foundation for the settlement in Leda. The presentations helped us recognize the pioneer spirit in Leda, a spirit of living one's daily life with a willingness to sacrifice personal hopes, dreams and even loved ones in the effort to develop the legacy of our True Parents.

In order to help us understand the Leda pioneer spirit, our hosts created a schedule of activities and reflection that enabled us to get a taste of what their life is like. We experienced a variety of ways in which Leda members strive to develop food resources and techniques that can help ease the suffering in the world.

### **Time Well-Spent**



Our daily schedule began with a time of prayer and spiritual sharing, and the day was usually filled with activities that provided us with unforgettable experiences. On one of those occasions we gathered in the morning by the vast rows of taro that occupied a substantial piece of land. Taro is the major crop planted on the grounds and the pioneers developed a unique technique of rooting these plants underwater to protect them from becoming "bird food." We walked either barefoot or with high boots into the

submerged muddy fields to harvest by hand the large taro plants thriving there. The taro we harvested was then bagged and later presented to the Vice President of Paraguay who had personally requested it in order to research its commercial viability.



One of the more physically challenging days we faced happened when we were asked to clear uncultivated land in a way similar to that used by the original pioneers. Our goal was to prepare the land to receive seedlings of neem trees—a valuable plant that yields mahogany-like timber, oil, medicinal products, and insecticide. To do this we used axes, scythes and shovels, disturbing snakes, bugs and other creatures as we labored to clear the land. For the next several days, our sore muscles served to remind us of the work we did that morning.



Everyone likes to catch fish. When you work as a group to trawl a fishpond, then everyone can catch fish. One exciting afternoon we worked as a team and dragged a long net across a wide pond nearly 80 meters long. Pulling the net through a step-by-step advance in the mud gave each of us a chance to be part of the harvest. As we finally closed the nets, hundreds of frantic pacu, weighing between 3 and 7 pounds, were hand-carried to nearby barrels. Once harvested, we shifted to an area where we could cut and clean the fish and ready them for eating.



Near the dock stands a small but well-constructed police station. This station was created by the Leda Settlement and replaced the old shack that was the previous headquarters for the police. Our volunteers saw that the station could use a “facelift,” so we spent a day painting the two-story structure. Working in small teams, this effort went smoothly and much got accomplished in a short time. Some of our artists also worked on repainting the special shield that was the insignia for the police station. Later, several participants shared how they had a deep feeling of satisfaction in being able to make this kind of offering in Leda.



The period in Leda offered each of us the opportunity to fish, ride horses, take hikes and spend time in the pristine natural environment near the shores of the Paraguay River. For many, the environment gave us a chance to understand something about life, ourselves, the creation and its wonderful Creator.

#### **A Deeper Understanding of the Founders**

As newcomers, we could understand more clearly through our activities at the Leda Settlement True Parents' vision and concern for the development of this region and how that vision in part has been

realized through the tireless efforts of the Japanese missionaries who have pioneered this project. We were reminded that this land had been described by the True Father in 1999 as “a forsaken hellish wilderness,” yet he also implored the group of Japanese elders to transform that land into a heaven on earth. What others had rejected is now becoming a cornerstone in a global effort to eradicate hunger and provide a model of peaceful community living.



We grew to understand that the heart invested in developing the Leda Settlement is embodied in the everyday sacrificial lifestyle of its residents. While many of us had intellectually understood the Divine Principle as a religious teaching, few understood its power when it is lived out on a daily basis. This experience of seeing, working with and sharing with the Japanese missionaries helped demonstrate the great power generated when a community practices a lifestyle dedicated to “living for the sake of others.”



The Leda Settlement’s spirit is rooted in True Parents’ teachings, which make it clear that when one is blessed, it is important to share that blessing with others. The Leda pioneers have intensively put this principle into practice, specifically exemplified in their concern for the neighboring indigenous villages that, when they arrived, had no functioning school. The Leda settlers deemed it essential that the village children receive a good education and so they invested, built and helped maintain schools in each of the three neighboring villages.

## **Restoring Relationships**

An important aspect of the teachings of True Parents concerns restoring damaged relationships. As we had discovered while in Olimpo, the relationship between the civic and religious leaders in Olimpo in the past had been very poor. The pioneers in Leda desired to see those relationships improve and they were willing to take the initiative to make sure that this would happen. As part of that effort, a team of young Japanese volunteers went to Olimpo and offered a variety of services to the community and local schools. Free martial arts classes were provided to local school children and the staff of Leda helped make clear plans with local community leaders for the coming of our international team.



Through such efforts at restoring trust and establishing cooperation, our project in July could stimulate the development of many friendships. This is a natural result when one's actions are guided by principle.