

Pathways to a Sustainable Future Project in Bahia Negra, near Leda, Paraguay

John W. Gehring
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True Father left us with many reminders of how one should love God, our Heavenly Parent. Through his words and deeds, we are reminded that loving God is accomplished in part through loving God's children with our whole hearts. Loving the creation is an extension of that love, since the Creator designed the creation to be the greatest gift to his children. We can grow to understand the heart behind this principled love by gaining a deeper understanding of parental love. A person sets the foundation for fulfilling the three great blessings (Gen. 1:28) by loving God, loving others and loving nature and accomplishing his or her purpose in life.

We as people of faith can remind our communities of what is most important in life. We need to do this in ways that can catch people's hearts and imagination. We need to be able to help humanity reconnect to our original purpose and especially assist those whose basic desire is to become a good person. To be effective, we need to appeal to people's noble sentiments. We should creatively stimulate and guide individuals and communities so that they can fulfill the three great blessings. How can we do this?

The following account depicts one such effort. While it focuses on a specific undertaking, the third Pathways to a Sustainable Future Project, this comes on the foundation of a core group of Japanese church elders having already invested sustained effort for nearly two decades to transform a desolate, abandoned, land (a hell) into a bright kingdom of heaven.



A three-blessing campaign

The community of Bahia Negra rests on the banks of the Paraguay River and serves as a gateway into the

nation from Brazil. "Good things or bad things can travel through a gateway so it is important that we keep ours clean," explained Father Juan of the local Catholic church. We launched the Love God, Love Humanity, Love Nature campaign on June 30 in Bahia Negra with the motto Clean City, Clean Soul (in Spanish, *Ciudad Limpia Alma Limpia*).

The campaign serves as a way to remind people why it is important not to litter. Our volunteers worked with students, faculty and others over four days on a campaign aimed at showing the students and community how to respect the environment. The cleanup campaign and tree planting involved the Roman Catholic Church and local educators and had the support of the municipality.



The planners understood that involving young people in various parts of the program helps them develop a sense of ownership that they will not easily forget. In this way, they are more likely to make a good future impression on their community.

In a schoolyard, in two days we cleaned and painted eighty garbage cans and then stenciled on them the words, "Ciudad Limpia Alma Limpia." The launch of the campaign came after the superintendent, Professora Juana de Ovelor, reminded us why we should keep our environment clean. A cleanup march followed, picking up trash and placing in the newly distributed cans, which we placed throughout the town. The next day, our group joined many community members at Sunday morning mass at the Catholic church. At the service, Father Juan thanked each volunteer and explicitly recognized True Parents for their important work in Leda and in the local community. He followed this with a prayer for Mother and Father Moon and those that had come to serve.



After the service, volunteers and congregants went outside to work and planted forty neem trees and forty fruit trees. The neem tree is good for the environment and offers health benefits and everyone enjoys eating its fruit. When we completed the planting, the church hosted a banquet and all involved felt a deep sense of accomplishment.

Before we departed from Bahia Negra, we talked with Fr. Juan. He said that the Love God, Love Humanity, Love Nature campaign is appealing to young people of all religions because it speaks to our core values as people of faith. He noted that such a campaign could spread to communities all along the Paraguay River and beyond. We hope this becomes a reality, because it is a way for our movement to work with many other people who share our values. This campaign is an effective way of promoting the three blessings as God's most precious gift to humanity.

The volunteers also created a beautiful mural in the local school and gave a fresh look to the welcome sign that greets all who enter Bahia Negra.

How it all began

Following a fourteen-hour journey on dusty roads from Asunción, the capital city, to the far northeastern corner of the Chaco region of Paraguay, a team of twenty-two participants from nine nations arrived in Bahia Negra District. The Bahia Negra region of Paraguay borders Brazil near the Bolivian border and is the northern entry place of the Paraguay River into Paraguay as it journeys south from the environmental haven of the Pantanal.

The volunteers were part of the third Pathways to a Sustainable Future Project, a program that received support from the Foundation for Sustainable Development in North and South America (Spanish initials:

F.D.S.A.N.S.), the Universal Peace Federation and FFWP in South America and North America.

Bahia Negra and Diana, a nearby indigenous community, are neighbors of our church's Leda settlement, which True Parents launched in 1999 and which Japanese national messiahs built up from scratch. True Parents had instructed these pioneers to improve the lives of those living in the neighboring communities and to protect the natural environment.

Taking this to heart, they built three of the first schools in the area and offered a wide variety of services including tree planting. Diana was the first community to receive volunteers and among the local indigenous villages, they were the first to have a school. The outreach to Diana has continued over the years and has produced a rich relationship of trust, respect and admiration toward True Parents and the Leda pioneers. When our young volunteer teams first came to Diana in 2003, they found a community without a school, electricity or even running water.

Since that time, many physical developments occurred but even more dramatic has been the change in the young people's approach to life. The school director stated that the example of the Unification Church volunteers, who were so friendly, kind, happy and well behaved, and who believed so strongly in the purity of love, was important. Young villagers saw that a different way of life was possible, and they no longer felt isolated from society.

The school director, Professor Benigno Gimenez, noted, "Before your groups arrived in our community many girls became pregnant at thirteen, fourteen, fifteen. Contact with your volunteers helped many change their attitudes. Now girls are waiting until they are older and more mature to start family life." The director also expressed that he and the community were grateful to Father Moon and those early Leda pioneers and happy that the tradition of volunteers visiting Diana continues.

Changing communities in such a positive way is exactly what our True Parents were hoping for when they originally set up the Leda settlement.



The Leda settlement

On July 6, the volunteers moved from the communities of Diana and Bahia Negra down the Paraguay River to the Unificationist Settlement at Puerta Leda. One participant said that arriving at Leda was "...like entering a different world. Leda is so clean, well-kept and full of an energy that is focused on transforming a forsaken land into a land where families can experience the kingdom of heaven."

The settlement began with True Parents' initiative and the faithful response of Japanese national messiahs in 1999. Today, the settlement has claim to a landmass larger than that of the city of Tokyo, and its modern, well-kept facilities and ambitious innovations in fish farming, agriculture and animal husbandry stand as a reminder of what people can do when they unite with our True Parents' hearts and teachings.

They learned about the fish farming efforts being carried out at the Leda settlement, which were an expression of the pioneer's desire to accomplish True Parents' direction that they create a model to address

the scourge of world hunger. In just one of the settlement's twenty-three ponds volunteers netted hundreds of pounds of pacu (herbivorous freshwater fish native to northern South America) and then cleaned and prepared the fish for market. The nets they pulled required each person to work cooperatively even as the water became deeper and deeper. Despite the difficulties, it was a satisfying experience.

The volunteers also learned about taro, an easily harvested plant, which they picked and cleaned. The settlement has many large fields of taro, which tastes like potato but is significantly more nutritious. Taro is a root plant that multiplies generations of new plants from a mother plant. Each new plant growing from the mother can feed a family for three days.

An animal preserve

During their time at the Leda settlement, the volunteers joined in the early stages of creating the Pantanal Animal Park, a relatively new project for the Leda settlement. It evolved out of True Parents' desire to ensure the conscientious protection of nature in the Pantanal. Volunteers helped in the construction of a small bridge, the painting of a Welcome sign, grounds preparation and the planting of new grass and flowers. This visionary project will be part of future eco-tours in the region and it will provide visitors a better sense of the variety of animals in the region. The Pantanal is one of the last large tracts of land with hundreds of species of fish, mammals and birds.

Toiling in the hot sun

The original Leda pioneers want participants to taste the "pioneer experience" by having them labor to clear land. They arranged for us to cut and clear a small section of bushland. Blisters arose on nearly everyone's hands in intensive and physically taxing process of cutting trees and clearing the area. After this morning of hard labor, participants gained a deeper appreciation of the effort the settlers had invested. The realization that the pioneers were over fifty years old when they began the challenging task was sobering.



Great returns on their investment

The following day, the volunteers went fishing on boats with rods and reels in the Paraguay River. Their experience on the river was both enjoyable and productive. They caught numerous fish. Other highlights of the five-day stay were horseback riding, visiting Pig Land, the home for over seven hundred free range pigs and a tour of the facilities that included a home for True Parents and a large swimming pool for visitors.

While reflecting, our young volunteers thought through some of the things that Leda had taught them. Chiaki, from the United States, wrote, "This project helped me understand the importance of having a global heart that transcends cultural and

language differences. It inspired me to want to contribute not just on a small scale but for the greater good." Joong Lee, a Korean-born third-generation member, currently living in the US, wrote, "This program taught me that any dream is possible as long as we persist. The Japanese pioneers at Leda started from the bottom, and now not only do they have enough for themselves, but they help others.

They could only do this by having a purpose harder than diamond that made them persevere through the challenges they had to face." Our time at Leda allowed us to reflect, work and regain a sense of confidence. It served to remind each volunteer that we can realize our dreams of a better society, one where people do love God, love others, love nature. We look forward to bringing this experience to many others in the years ahead because it is one powerful way to help shape a culture of peace.

Summary

The change of culture that has occurred in Bahai Negra is a response to the sustained efforts made by the Japanese national messiahs. Another critical factor is the cooperation between the priest in Bahia Negra and our community. A third contributor is the cooperation with the municipality, civic and religious leadership on the Love God, Love others, Love nature campaign, expressing the three great blessings. The third Pathways to a Sustainable Future Project brought twenty-three volunteers from eight nations together. The regional president for South American provided scholarships for participants from Latin America, and the US Family Federation also helped, so good North America– South America cooperation was also a factor in this success.