

Franco Famularo: Montreal Church Thrives on Spirit of Volunteerism and Youth Ministry

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Salaried Unificationist pastors may be the rule in larger cities of the United States, but in Montreal, the largest city of Eastern Canada, the volunteer spirit is alive and well, according to the Unificationist leader there.

“We have a very good community of dedicated families, of brothers and sisters who joined mostly in the 70s and are committed to the cause,” said Rev. Famularo, the District Pastor for Eastern Canada. “Nobody here is on a full-time salary. At most, we get reimbursed for church-activity expenses and some get a small stipend. Because of our great volunteer spirit, I believe our community has been wholesome and somewhat healthy. For Canada, I don’t believe an emphasis on establishing a professional paid leadership role will work, because we’re not there yet. Our communities are still small and local,” he explained.

Canada is home to approximately 130 Unificationist families, of which 47 couples and 120 second-generation Unificationists are located in Eastern Canada, which has its District Headquarters in Montreal. According to Rev. Franco Famularo, the senior pastor in Montreal and Canada’s church historian, Canada is divided into three Districts: One focused on Toronto, the site for Canada’s national headquarters, one focused on Montreal and one focused on Vancouver, the smallest of the three communities with 15-20 families. Outside of these three cities are pockets of members in various places; the largest small community is found in Ottawa and has four or five families that gather for a regular Sunday Service.

There is no national workshop because of the difficulty and cost of coordinating all Canadian members to gather at one place. However, church members in Vancouver connect with the Unificationist community in Seattle, Washington, located only two-and-a-half hours away. Unificationists in Toronto and Montreal converge for activities such as summer camp and also travel to New York City to mingle with Unificationists there, participating in workshops at the Unification Theological Seminary (UTS) in Barrytown, Blessing workshops, Camp Sunrise and occasionally Sunday Service.

“We were strongly connected to Lovin’ Life Ministries because of our proximity to New York and because there are a few families here are connected to True Family,” said Rev. Famularo. “When Rev. In Jin Moon resigned, it wasn’t a total surprise. We had a Q&A meeting, one with second-generation members and another with first-generation members, and the reaction of the second-generation was more matter of fact. Some were disturbed by financial issues in our church, but we’ve been able to discuss things openly, which has helped. I found the first gen to be a lot more upset about the situation, but there was also some relief expressed that issues in the True Family were being addressed.”



The Unificationist Community in Montreal

Within the Montreal community, 20 second-generation Unificationists currently attend universities. Nine of these twenty are at McGill University, where young Unificationist Francois Lacroix recently got books on Unificationist ideas and history into the school library, and two at Concordia University.

Rev. Famularo helps host Sunday Service every Sunday at 10:00 a.m. at the Montreal church. He explained: “Generally, I will speak on the first Sunday of each month. Then a woman, first- or second-generation, will speak on the second Sunday. For the third Sunday, we have a French-speaking service led by the local city leader, Pastor Serge Brosseau, whose wife, Melissa, helps organize the music and plays piano for each Sunday Service. A second-generation Unificationist speaks on the fourth Sunday. The second-generation participate as the MCs and provide music for every service, regardless of the speakers.”

Sunday school is composed of five classes for children from ages 5-14. All members of the community convene for the first half hour of the Sunday Service, which includes music, announcements, sometimes a video presentation, and then children go to their separate classrooms for Sunday school during the general service. Children 14 and older have their own service on the third Sunday of every month and stay for the general service all other Sundays.



Church Activities: CHARP and Workshops

An organization unique to Montreal is the College and High school Association for the Research of Principles (CHARP), a new interpretation on the better-known Collegiate Association for the Research of Principles (CARP). CHARP is a youth ministry program for children ages 14 and up and was founded in 2001 by two young Unificationists, Arnel Cloarec and Paula Duffy, after they participated in workshops in Europe. Activities take place on Friday evenings at the Montreal church and has three components: education, fun and service, which include presentations by longtime members, a movie, board games and sports. Three or four young Unificationists, including Francois Lacroix, Carla Ferreira and Claire Lacroix, help lead these meetings, rotating leadership responsibilities to create a welcoming environment for the 10-30 children and young adults participating in CHARP’s meetings.

The Montreal community organizes four workshops every year – a summer camp workshop, a workshop during spring break, a winter workshop around the time of Christmas and New Year’s and a workshop during Canadian Thanksgiving, which takes place in the second week of October.



“We’ve been doing these workshops for about 15 years now,” said Rev. Famularo. “The winter workshop this year had about 45 participants, and the summer camp will have about 75. Summer camp, which is for children under 16 and lasts for one week, has been going on since the mid-90s and is now run primarily by the second-generation. Things have changed as our children have gotten older, and now we have separate workshops for children and young adults, and the workshops for young adults, which

involve guest lecturers from abroad and the local community, are organized entirely by the second-generation.”

He continued: “We also hold a monthly community meeting for both first- and second-generation Unificationists at which all matters of the church are openly discussed. Topics range from the finances of the church to how to best modify the Sunday Service program to outreach. The men hold a weekly breakfast to discuss any issue on their minds, and the women hold monthly meeting to organize their activities and to discuss issues of concern. We've recently initiated a monthly fellowship meeting open to all where we share spiritually.”



Addressing the Lack of Church Growth

One problem for which a solution has yet to be found for the Montreal community is that of acquiring new church members.

“During the past 15 years, our community has grown through members emigrating here from Africa, Europe, etc., but in terms of new members, we’ve had very few – five or six – since the early 90s,” said Rev. Famularo. “One problem is that nationally, we’ve been under foreign leadership since the 90s. We were just assigned a new national leader, Rev. Moonshik Kim. Before that we had Rev. Katsumi Kambashi for five years and Rev. Chae Hee Lee, for 16 years. We grew in the 60s, in the 70s, in the 80s until the 90s, but we’ve had little growth since the 90s. There could be multiple reasons for that – familial struggles, inconsistent outreach, lack of regular DP seminars – but this has been a problem not only in Canada, but also all over the western world. We’ve tried a few things over the years, such as going door to door, visiting people, distributing books, doing things of that nature, and although we’re constantly discussing this matter, we haven’t found what has worked yet.

“The question ‘Why haven’t we grown?’ bothers me. We’ve managed to preserve our Blessed Children and keep them involved, at least socially, but time will tell if they will continue on with this. As a member who’s been around for almost 38 years, I’m most concerned about finding a way to pass our tradition and beliefs to the next generation. Unless this happens in the next ten years or so, we may be in for more serious crises for the movement than we can imagine. I hear the same things from Europe, Asia, and South America. How to grow? How to get people, especially the second-generation, involved? We can bring new people through the door into an introductory lecture or Sunday Service, but then they read negative things about our church online. I think our movement needs to spend some of its resources on marketing and enhancing its public image in a professional way.”