

Uganda's 1975 Missionaries

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East African Regional President Bakary Camara, a fellow African, visits Uganda.

No one anticipated that Uganda's independence from Britain in 1962 would unleash forces that led to the bloody decades that followed. Like Ugandans today, we enjoy the benefits of a world with less friction and enmity than in past decades. True Parents brought together elements to create this current foundation through the 1,800-couple blessing and the dispatch of missionary trinities, who struggled for harmony among themselves even as they bumped up against the culture of their assigned nations. Later missionaries added to this foundation. As Father explained at Lancaster Gate, in London, on May 20, 1978:

Before I sent out all the missionaries, I blessed 1,800 couples.... Where did the number 18 come from? Eighteen is six times three. Six is Satan's number. The lost number, six, was taken away by Satan; restoring the number six in three different categories resulted in 1,800 couples, which includes all the satanic families. In other words, any kind of satanic family can come to God, can come to truth, can be saved. I laid railroad track in 1,800 directions so everybody finds a track, finds a direction. Any nation can find a direction to come to God and the True Parents. We are now moving on those rails.

The 1,800-Couple Blessing Ceremony took place in Seoul on February 8, 1975. Father announced, in Tokyo, four days later, that members of their blessing group were to become foreign missionaries. William Connery, then barely twenty-six, remembers, "We had a special meeting on February 12: a list of ninety-five nations was read out. We were to pick out three. My choices were French Guyana, Rhodesia and Singapore."

William attended a workshop for missionary candidates at Barrytown, March 3–May 14, 1975. "During that period, Rev. Moon came to speak to us at least ten times. His advice was always strong and fatherly," he recalled. He described the workshop schedule as "strenuous." "My own greatest challenge started on April 5.... US church president Salonen took me aside to ask if I would be willing to go to Uganda. Without much hesitation, I said yes. Actually, I knew very little about Uganda but my

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What had happened in Uganda that might have come to William's attention? In April 1972, news emerged of the disappearance and murder of an American journalist and a university lecturer together in Uganda a year earlier. In August 1972, President Idi Amin (January 1971–April 1979) deported eighty thousand Indian merchants, many of whose families had lived in Uganda for three generations. The missionaries would witness first-hand the economic devastation that this mass deportation caused.

Undoubtedly, the people that suffered most under Idi Amin were Ugandans. Amin arranged the murders of many of Ugandans, the famous and the little known. He declared himself president for life in 1976. Amin developed a reputation for being volatile, erratic, tempestuous—"the wild man of Africa." All over the globe, this leader of that relatively small country was making headlines.

The Washington Post reported that in a radio broadcast, Amin had said, "he would not stand for any 'dirty tricks.' He said he was shocked to learn that twenty-two minor religious sects had infiltrated Uganda from the U.S. in the past two years." Certainly, that was not a report to calm the heart of our young missionary, who had said "yes," to Uganda.

How did William respond to what he learned? “I gave my fate to God,” he said, “praying in my mind: ‘Well, if You want to get rid of me, this is Your chance. Anyway, I will go because someone must bring Your New Word to the Ugandan people and it is better for me to die than for some worthier brother or sister to go and die.’” He flew to Uganda in mid-May 1975. That first step caused apprehension. Of the flight to Entebbe Airport, he recalled, “My stomach was turning over like a person awaiting execution.”

One of his fellow missionaries would later testify to the strong conditions William Connery set while in Uganda. “Rev. Moon told us to make special conditions for our nations,” William wrote, “My first started as soon as I left the plane—I began a seven-day food fast. I felt that God was protecting me from the very beginning.”

By chance, he met the Germany missionary, Ulf Ingwersen, soon after his arrival. The last of their trinity, Hideaki Kamiyoshi, they would not find until late September. Mr. Connery’s testimony describes their efforts to get work permits and employment, but it is not a dry account of young men job hunting. There’s palpable tension from opposing forces—their desire to make a mark on the country and the awareness that they must remain hidden from predators who could put an end to their mission, or their lives. “As our circle of friends grew,” he wrote, “more people told us stories of the beatings and killings that were taking place. Our hands were tied: if we did anything to help our friends, we could be easily kicked out of the country. Our only solace was the word of God we could teach people through the Divine Principle.”

William chronicles many instances of teaching people, beginning from his third day in the country. While teaching the Principle of Creation, quietly, one-on-one, in a small park, on July 27, 1975, an officer of the State Research Bureau (SRB), Amin’s secret police, descended on him. Papers confiscated, address revealed, he headed quickly home once released; but like hounds on a scent, SRB officers rapidly were at the door. They arrested William, Ulf and Abdul, a Bangladeshi they rented a room from, and put them into the back seat of a car. The driver took them to a vacant building. He went in, came back and kept driving. “Next, we were driven to the three-story building, which had the external appearance of a motel, where they knew most of the SRB victims were beaten and eventually killed. Our driver again went in and again he came out after a few minutes and drove us away.” Even after darkness descended, the car continued to wander the city streets. They reasoned it was just an attempt to throw them off-kilter, an intimidation tactic. But how were they to know? Ugandans were not the only ones who had “disappeared.”

Eventually, they were taken to a small ground-floor room beneath SRB living quarters. There, officers interrogated them, hurled wild accusation at them but did not beat them. It was the uncertainty that must have worked on their hearts.

Many have speculated as to how many thousands the SRB killed. No figure has been offered for how few walked away. On Tuesday afternoon, the three men were taken to meet the Permanent Secretary for Education, who may have intervened because Abdul was a college lecturer. They had been released, physically unscathed.

William’s daily life, as revealed in his testimony, continued thereafter in a focused, determined manner as he spread Heaven’s “New Word” up until the day in 1978 that he was called to attend the seminary. The other two missionaries continued in his absence. We have no way of measuring to what degree the effort of these pioneers contributed to freeing the world. What we have is Father’s word that they were part of a railroad track to freedom, hope and the original world, which he laid “in 1,800 directions.”