

Staffan Berg: Thank you Unification Theological Seminary

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Photo: (from left) Staffan Berg and fellow alumnus, Ratnasabapathy Thillairajan

Staffan Berg grew up in Gothenburg, a seaport in Sweden. He was working on his Bachelor of Science degree in chemical engineering, when he was required to leave his studies to fulfill Sweden's compulsory military service. "A year in the barracks may have set me on the path of a truth seeker. I was raised in the Lutheran faith tradition and was always taught that killing was wrong. In the army I was being trained to kill. I felt trapped; what moral paradigm was I going to follow?" This dilemma led Berg to study different religions and when his military service ended and after completing his degree he began to travel – Japan, India, Nepal and Australia were just a few of his pit stops in his search for the right path to follow in his life.

His wandering eventually led him to San Francisco where he joined the Unification Movement. "At the time my older sister was in the communist party – and she wasn't favorable to me joining; ironically now my family loves the [Unification Church](#)."

Recalling his years at the Unification Theological Seminary (UTS) Berg reflects, "At the beginning of my studies at UTS I needed help with writing. It was so painful to learn to write well in English as it was my second language. Erin Bouma, who was on the UTS staff at the time, helped me to improve my writing skills. I felt so grateful to her for her help."

Although he was well grounded in traditional Christian teachings, Berg says, "I learned the factual knowledge that I may have not acquired otherwise. This really gave confidence as I could better grasp theology to improve my understanding of different religious traditions. I knew that in the future I wouldn't feel intimidated in discussions as I would have a broader knowledge of issues – particularly in Christianity."

Staffan recalls his close friendships with his UTS classmates. "I remember my fundraising trips; they were life changing. I was on a team with Bruce Sutchar, Krzysztof Hempowicz, and Clopha Deshotel – we all had such a great time just being crazy together. We were working in Long Island and I felt we were a special team; we were like the four Musketeers! We have sustained our friendship for decades – occasionally they come to visit in Arizona."

Berg remained at UTS for a third year to complete the [Master of Divinity](#) program and graduated in 1985. He went on to church leadership positions in Arkansas and Texas, eventually settling in Tempe, AZ with his wife Jane (UTS'83) and they raised a son and a daughter. He needed to make money, so he and Jane created a flower delivery service out of their home. Berg says, "As a couple we had to work together and manage our differences. In order for our business to succeed we had to create harmony in our marriage; if our relationship wasn't good, money didn't flow in." In some respects, the flower business became an extended ministry. Jane had received the same training as Staffan at UTS and having cultivated

relationship skills they both found that in business these skills were put to good use. Staffan explains, "In our flower business – people would call in their orders, but often kept Jane on the phone to have long conversations about their families. Customers were sometimes looking for relationship guidance."

In 2006 learned about real estate from the mother of a classmate of his daughter. He bought an apartment complex of 30 units. Berg learned the challenge of finding good tenants for his properties. Says Berg, "I could see a big difference between being a tenants vs. being an owner. Owners tend to have a different view and attitude towards life than renters."

In 2008 he enrolled in the [Doctor of Ministry](#) program at UTS. "I completed all the course work. The D.Min. program was really fantastic. I would highly recommend this program for anyone seriously pursuing ministry."

Berg's studies were interrupted, however, when he responded to a request to go take a leadership position in Las Vegas and Nevada for the [Family Federation for World Peace and Unification](#) (FFWPU). On returning to Tempe, Berg continued to serve the local Tempe and Phoenix FFWPU community.

Staffan and Jane took on a new and demanding challenge. A local woman attending weekly FFWPU meetings, a refugee from Nigeria, was struggling with substance abuse issues. Her two children were placed in a group home; Staffan and Jane decided to step in. They opened their home – and their hearts – to these young people and provided a home.

"We now have legal guardianship of them until they are 18. We take them camping and on other family outings. My son and daughter are still at home, and there are many emotional issues for us to deal with in caring for these refugee children (now in their early teens.) Additionally, an elderly community member also lives with the Bergs a good part of the year. So instead of living the lives of "empty nesters", the Bergs now have a three generation family. Although not all related by blood they consider themselves part of the same spiritual family.

"Jane and I have had to re-visit both Middle School and High School issues. Our home is busy. Most evenings we have at least seven people at the dinner table, and are often joined by other friends." The household looks like a mini United Nations with Sweden, England, Nigeria, Poland and the United States all represented.

Berg's optimism is based on his past life experiences. "Despite what is happening in the world, I am confident that things can change. When I was working with the [Collegiate Association for the Research of Principles](#) (CARP) we thought communism was going to roll over us – it was a tough time. Admittedly it is now scary, with missiles flying across from Korea, and the nuclear stuff in Iran, but I believe radical change can happen."

His optimism is framed by his faith. "I look at the kind of foundation I have made in my life and I have a sense of free choice. I can choose to look at the glass as half full or half empty. I am actually more interested in being a doer of the word. Fear sells well. Getting a division into two camps – us and them - is dangerous. We need people to be bigger, to seek a higher viewpoint and demonstrate a more parental heart. It's time for people to grow up."

"I believe God's hand is steering history – false ideals may manifest first, but the pendulum will eventually swing back; perhaps negative forces may prevail for a while, but not forever. I believe that something good is coming."

Berg now serves on the board of the [Arizona Interfaith Movement](#) whose stated mission is to 'build bridges...by implementing the [Golden Rule](#).'

"Implementing the golden rule - especially when you are intimate in a marriage – is a beginning point. You actually need to go beyond just treating the other person as you wanted to be treated; you have to discover how to love your partner in the unique way in which they feel loved. Some young people think religion is passé, but what we really need is more flesh on the bones; real love goes the golden rule one better; you need to love people specifically – particularly your spouse."