

Fruits of Lovin' Life Ministry Evident after Two Years

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Rev. In Jin Moon celebrates the 2nd Year Anniversary of Lovin' Life Ministries with the congregation on April 3, 2011.

Some members in her own church said it couldn't be done, but two years after the Reverend In Jin Moon and her team launched Lovin' Life Ministries New York City, the results are in: hundreds of new members and a slew of revitalized youth organizations that promise to bring an unprecedented harvest in 2011.

Rev. Moon began two years ago by creating a rock music-led worship experience in a venue where lighting, sound and atmospheric effects were state of the art: the legendary Grand Ballroom of the Manhattan Center on West 34th Street.

In addition to building an acclaimed rock band known today as Sonic Cult, she crafted complex, multi-layered sermons that surprised audiences from the beginning by combining telling anecdotes, intimate stories about her father and mother, references to the Bible as well as the wisdom of other religions and the insights of modern literature. She first preached at the Manhattan Center on Easter Sunday, 2009 and enlarged her audience with a nationwide broadcast to a hundred satellite churches from Feb. 7, 2010. Her Lovin' Life team proved that it could travel and put on stellar shows in Washington, D.C. in January, 2011 and to a crowd of 2,400 in Las Vegas on March 5-6, 2011.

Whereas rock music had been ignored by the old guard of Unification leaders a generation ago, Rev. Moon has made it synonymous with her worship style. For two years running, she has sponsored a memorial concert to honor her brother, the late Hyo Jin Moon, (1962 -2008) who had insisted that rock music could capture the heart of youth everywhere. On trips to Brazil, Paraguay, Uruguay in 2010 and to Costa Rica (January 2011), Rev. Moon has spent hours encouraging young Unificationists to invest in music, to aim for excellence in school and to dream big. She told a youth choir in San Jose that her hope was to make an annual concert in Costa Rica patterned after her World Peace choir events for Unificationist children in Japan since 2001.

Let's Dance!



Ms. Ariana Shin Sun Moon (right) performs a dance exhibition with her Harvard University dance partner after service on April 3 before a ballroom social is held for all.

As reported by National Public Radio in a special radio report in February, 2010, Rev. Moon has created the nucleus of a mega-church, an unprecedented step for a new religious movement. Her style of ministry has meant fun for the congregation after service as well. Her daughter, Ariana Shin Sun Moon, an expert ballroom dance instructor, began teaching the waltz and swing dance in the summer of 2009 at the Manhattan Center after every service and within a few months, church members across the nation were on the dance floor. In fact, ballroom dancing has becoming an important church ministry in its own right. By Rev. Moon's lights, dance is a not only a way for young men and women to socialize but to learn the rules of civility when dealing with the opposite sex.

The gala, once foreign to Unification Church culture, has become a signature event, with galas having been organized for awards ceremonies for the Universal Peace Federation (UPF), and for annual gatherings of the Collegiate Association for the Research of Principles (CARP) and the Women's Federation for World Peace (WFWP). The fancy-dress affair in Costa Rica in January, 2011 drew six first ladies from the region to participate.

Although the new membership system was announced only in August of 2010, already 222 new church members had signed up, Rev. Moon announced to her national congregation on April 3, 2011.

"Lovin' Life Ministries has been quite busy giving birth to new members," she said. "We've been doing a lot of different work: We've been creating new membership forms, different ways of getting people to participate and contribute, and to be inspired about who we are, God's children who have a beautiful example in the form of our True Parents here with us, living at this time of breaking news, when we can not only dream and learn about ideal families but actually have the opportunity to create one ourselves,"

Meet the New Members



New Unificationist members who joined through Lovin' Life Ministries, signing membership forms in 2010.

“The new members are coming from 17 different states and are a reflection of America,” according to Mrs. Heather Thalheimer, the head of the Lovin' Life's Ministries department. “Our survey of them showed that the majority first encountered the church by visiting one of our services. They are all people who know clearly who the True Parents are, and are committed to attending Sunday services, donating and studying Divine Principle,” she added.

One young man who recently joined the Unification Church gave his testimony in a videotaped statement presented to the congregation at the anniversary service: “Hi, I'm from Brooklyn, and I'm 26 years old, and I'm a new member of the Unification Church. I remember attending the Lovin' Life services for the first time, and it was the feeling of the solid embrace as soon as I walked through the door that just tied in everything. It was just the music, the whole feeling, and In Jin Nim's speeches; it all came together into this cluster bomb of compatibility for me. To the Lovin' Life community, I would like to say: 'You've really changed my life, and I just wanted to say thank you from the bottom of my heart.' ”

Mrs. Thalheimer, who has been working closely with Rev. Moon to develop new materials that will spur a continuous sense of momentum in every Unificationist congregation, explained the strategy of a national ministry brand of Lovin' Life. “The idea is to have a united congregation in which we have a common standard of excellence of who we are nationally. I am excited by the new membership material, because we now have a clear way for people to commit to membership, and there is so much potential for new growth.”

Social Impact of Unificationist Groups

Rev. Moon showcased the ecumenical facet of the Unification movement by adding a signature element to her service: the benediction each Sunday is given by a minister of a non-Unificationist faith tradition. “The test of interfaith work is the willingness to worship on Sunday with us,” Pastor David Hunter told the congregation in a video overview of Lovin' Life on April 3, 2011. In addition, Rev. Moon has taken the time for two years to be the keynote speaker at the annual convocation of the American Clergy and Leadership Conference (ACLC). One result is that “churches are now partnering up with

Lovin' Life, and worshipping together with us," she announced.

For decades, the persecution of Japanese Unification Church members in Japan went tragically unpublicized as thousands of members suffered abduction and psychological torture by enemies of the church. That changed in June of 2009, after Rev. Moon had lunch with Mr. Toru Goto, a Japanese Unificationist who had suffered false imprisonment for 12 years as a prisoner of conscience. Rev. Moon acted quickly. She introduced Mr. Goto to the Lovin' Life congregation the next day as a hero of faith. She then mobilized a coalition of Unification-supported groups to publicize the issue, including the Unification Church, the Universal Peace Federation, CARP, the ACLC, the International Coalition for Religious Freedom and the Women's Federation for World Peace (WFWP).



Rev. In Jin Moon (left) presents flowers to Mr. Toru Goto (right) at Lovin' Life Ministries in June 2009.

In November of 2010, Unificationists and their allies of other churches demonstrated in front of Japanese Consulates in 12 states. In 2010, Rev. Moon recruited Mr. Luke Higuchi, who is himself a survivor of abduction, to start the Survivors Against Forced Exit (SAFE). In the fall of 2010 and in early March 2011, Mr. Higuchi was a guest of radio and TV talk shows in which he and other victims told their stories. He succeeded in getting coverage by Korean news media based in New York. After years of being in the shadow, the abduction victims are starting to get their message out into the public square as a result of united action.

Rev. Moon sees the church at the juncture of a new era, one that will be more glorious for the rising generation. In her telling on Sunday: "In a way, our True Parents are saying, 'It's time to move on. It's time to enter into a new era.'" The whole purpose, or the whole vision, behind Lovin' Life Ministries, is to do just that. We need to take ourselves away from this wilderness mentality, and really liberate our hearts. As scary as it might be, to allow God to work mysteriously in our lives, God is here to tell us that it is time, brothers and sisters, not just to suffer and hunker down and fight for mere survival, but it's time to settle and to be empowered and manifest our divinity. It's time to be that bright shining light on to this country of America."