

## Justin and Pat Fleischman visit Senegal 40 years after they pioneered the country

Pat Fleischman  
June 10, 2015



Justin and Pat Fleischman began their mission work in the West African country of Senegal in 1975. Forty years later, the Fleischmans -- along with four of their five sons, three of whom were born in Senegal, and two daughters-in-law -- returned to the country from June 3 to 10, 2015, for the first visit in 23 years.





Upon arrival, they were greeted like family by the local Unificationist congregation. It was a thrill for Justin and Pat to meet familiar faces -- those who were young and single when they left, but who now greeted them with families of their own. For the locals, it was a warm reunion with the missionaries, whose 17 years there represent the longest presence by any missionary to the country -- what they consider a direct reflection of True Parents' love for Senegal and its people.



While rekindling friendships, the Fleischman family also had the opportunity to witness the many wonderful projects of which the local Senegalese Unificationists are a part.

Mr. Ambroise Diagne, the national leader of FFWPU in Senegal, gave the family a tour of a local preschool and elementary school that he and his family had built from scratch. The vision for the school includes expanding to eventually include middle and high school, and to offer not just academic education but also the teaching of character and values. All of the students recite a 4-point pledge every day that includes “to love God, my nation, my parents, my brothers and sisters, and to retain my purity.”



Kyungil, the Fleischmans' eldest son, and his wife, Renee Des Lauriers, who is a schoolteacher in the United States, noted the amazing spirit that was present in the school. “They were moved by experiencing [it] firsthand,” said Justin. Renee commented, “It was amazing to see that even though the school seemed lacking in resources compared to schools in America, everyone there was filled with so much excitement and joy. They were truly grateful and appreciative of everything they had. It was humbling and inspiring.”



One of the projects the Fleischmans were especially excited to see was a sewing school. During their missionary years they established a community school in which handicapped citizens learned sewing as a profession. In Third World countries the handicapped are often looked down upon and it is difficult for them to receive education or find means to support themselves. The sewing school saved these individuals from being relegated to a life begging on the streets.

Though the school closed down in the Fleischmans' absence, it recently reopened as a sewing school for girls, operating out of a training center founded by Unificationists and partially supported by Women's Federation for World Peace. Many of the students are now producing high-quality items, and the Fleischmans were pleased to see one of the students from the original sewing school there as well. Justin said, "This enables them to not merely earn income through their trade but to reinforce self-esteem and to build self-responsibility. In the long term this is helpful for enhancing the position of women in a culture where women are degraded."



Mr. Diagne, the Senegalese national leader, shared his plans to construct a local church headquarters, including meeting rooms and offices for the church, storefronts to be rented out for income, and apartments for church officers and families. At the moment, financial difficulties have caused construction to be suspended, but they look forward to restarting in the future.



The Fleischman family also spent time with local community members as they accompanied them to some of the major sights in Senegal. Elder Unificationists came with them on a trip to the Holy Ground in a local park. They also visited a nearby game reserve; Goree Island, the infamous place where slaves were shipped off to North and South America; and Lac Rose (Pink Lake), a popular tourist attraction that is colored pink due to organic activity triggered by the high content of salt in the water.



This long awaited reunion was transformative for all. The Fleischmans and their Senegalese brothers and sisters all expressed the desire to stay connected and to pray for, support and communicate with each other. Upon their return to Northern California, the family was moved to find many local Unificationists eager to donate funds to sponsor students at the school and support the missions going on in Senegal. It is clear that the seeds the family planted during their years in Senegal continue to sprout, serving the community and providing new opportunities.

To find out more or to make your own donation, contact Justin at [SenegalSchool@aol.com](mailto:SenegalSchool@aol.com).

