

## Leda, Paraguay Launches the "Love God, Love Others, Love Nature" Campaign

John W. Gehring  
January 6, 2018



True Father left us with many reminders about how one should love God, our Heavenly Parent. Through his words and deeds, we are reminded that loving God is accomplished in part through loving God's children with our whole hearts. Loving the creation is an extension of that love since the creation is designed to be God's greatest gift to His children. We can grow to understand the heart behind this principled love by gaining a deeper understanding of parental love. By loving God, loving others and loving nature, a person sets the foundation for fulfilling the Three Great Blessings (Gen. 1:28) and accomplishing his/her purpose in life.

The Divine Principle, along with the holy books of Christians, Jews and other great religions, points to ways in which humanity can become better at loving God, loving others and loving nature. Today, while the prime importance of this directive remains, as inherent in our original nature, it is increasingly difficult to find people striving in that direction. Our cultures offer distorted priorities and people seem driven by a haste to make money, to get ahead and to care primarily, or even exclusively for "number one."

We as people of faith are called to remind our communities of what is most important in life and this needs to be done in ways that can catch people's hearts and imagination. We need to be able to help humanity reconnect to our original purpose and especially assist those whose basic desire is to become a good person. To be effective, we need to reach people where they are at and appeal to their noble sentiments. We should creatively stimulate and guide individuals and communities so that they can fulfill the Three Great Blessings. How can this be done?

This following account depicts one such effort. While it focuses on a specific event, the 3rd Pathways to a Sustainable Future Project, it should be understood in the context that it is just one event in nearly two decades of sustained effort made by a core group of Japanese Church Elders. These pioneers have shed blood, sweat and tears to carry out True Parents' directive to transform a desolate, abandoned, land – a hell into a bright Kingdom of Heaven. They are the Founders of True Parents' Leda Settlement.

It is critical to find ways to teach the essence of the Principle so that it will appeal to the public. True Parents have modeled for us ways in which we should respond to nature, and the pioneers of the Leda Settlement in Paraguay for the past 20 years have been applying these lessons. The 3rd Pathways to a Sustainable Future Project offered participants and community members the opportunity to gain insights into loving God, loving others and loving nature.

### **Part 1 Launching a Three Blessing Campaign – Love God, Love Humanity, Love Nature**

The community of Bahia Negra rests on the banks of the Paraguay River and serves as a gateway into the nation. "Good things or bad things can travel through a gateway so it is important that we keep ours clean," explained Father Juan of the local Catholic Church. The Love God, Love Humanity, Love Nature campaign was launched on June 30th in Bahia Negra with the motto Clean City, Clean Soul – or in Spanish, Ciudad Limpio Alma Limpia. The campaign serves as a way to educate and remind people why it is important not to litter and, in general, why we should respect and care for the environment.

Our international volunteers worked with students, faculty and others over a period of four days on a campaign aimed at showing the students and community how to respect the environment. The clean-up campaign and tree planting involved the Roman Catholic Church and local educators, and had the

support of the municipality. The planners understood that involving young people in various parts of the program gave them a sense of ownership that they will not easily forget. In this way, they are more likely

to make a positive future impact on the community.

Eighty garbage cans were painted and the words, "Ciudad Limpio Alma Limpia" ("Clean City, Clean Soul"). The cleaning and painting of each can were done in the schoolyard and it took two days to complete. Shirts with the Spanish words for Love God, Love Humanity and Love Nature were distributed to all those who helped paint the cans. The launch of the campaign came after the Superintendent, Professora Juana de Ovelor, reminded us of why we should keep our environment clean. A cleanup march followed as trash was picked up and placed in the newly distributed cans that were placed throughout the town.

On the following day, which was Sunday our group joined many community members in attending morning mass at the local Catholic Church. At the service, Father Juan introduced and thanked each volunteer and he explicitly recognized True Parent's for their important work in Leda as well as in the local community. The sincerity of this message was clear as the good priest followed with a prayer for Mother and Father Moon and those that came to serve.

Following the church service, volunteers and congregants went outside to work and planted 40 neem trees and 40 fruit trees. The neem tree is very good for the environment and offers health benefits and everyone enjoys eating fruit. When the planting was completed, the church hosted a banquet and all involved felt a deep sense of accomplishment.

Before we departed from Bahia Negra, we talked with Fr. Juan and he shared that the Love God, Love Humanity and Love Nature campaign is very appealing to young people of all faiths because it speaks to our core values as people of faith. He noted that such a campaign could spread to communities all along the Paraguay River and beyond. We hope this becomes a reality for it is a way for our movement to work together with many, many other people who share our values. The Love God, Love Humanity, Love Nature campaign is an effective way of promoting the Three Blessings as God's most precious gift to humanity.

The volunteers also created a beautiful mural in the local school and gave a fresh look to the welcome sign that greets all who enter Bahia Negra.

## **Part 2: Diana Community Shares the Impact of Unification Volunteers**

Following a 14-hour journey on dusty roads from the capital city of Asuncion to the far Northeastern corner of the Chaco region of Paraguay, a team of 22 participants from nine nations arrived in Bahia Negra District. The Bahia Negra region of Paraguay borders Brazil and Bolivia and is the northern entry place of the Paraguay River as it journeys south from the environmental haven of the Pantanal. The volunteers were part of the 3rd Pathways to a Sustainable Future Project, a program that received support from the Fundacion para el Desarrollo Sustentable en las Americas del Norte y del Sur (F.D.S.A.N.S.), the Universal Peace Federation, and the Family Federation for World Peace, South America and North America.

Bahia Negra and the nearby indigenous community of Diana are neighboring communities to the Unification Church's Leda Settlement, which was launched in 1999 by True Parents' and pioneered by Japanese National Messiah's. True Parents' directions to the Japanese pioneers included the instruction

that they should work to improve the life of those living in the neighboring communities as well as protect the natural environment. The pioneers took those words to heart and built three of the first schools in the area and offered a wide variety of services including tree planting. Diana was the first community to receive volunteers and they were the first to have a school among the local indigenous villages. The outreach to Diana has continued over the years and the efforts have resulted in a rich relationship of trust, respect and admiration towards True Parents', the pioneers and the local communities.

When the volunteer teams first came to Diana in 2003, they found a community without electricity, running water or even a school. Since that time there have been many physical improvements but even more dramatic has been the change in the young people's approach to life. The school Director shared that the example provided by the Unification Church volunteers who were so friendly, kind, happy and well behaved, and who believed so strongly in the purity of love, was very important. It showed to the young villagers that a different way of life was possible, and they no longer felt isolated from society.

School Director Professor Benigno Gimenez noted, "Before your groups arrived in our community many girls became pregnant at a very young age, 13, 14, 15. This contact with your volunteers helped many change their attitudes. Now girls are waiting till they are older and more mature to start family life." The Director also expressed how grateful he and the community were to Father Moon and those early Leda pioneers, and expressed how happy he is that this tradition of volunteers continues.

It is well worth noting that the action of changing a community in such a positive way is exactly what our

True Parents were hoping for when they originally set up the Leda Settlement.

### **Part 3. Discovering the Leda Settlement**

On July 6, international volunteers from the 3rd Pathways to a Sustainable Future Project moved from the communities of Diana and Bahia Negra down the Paraguay River to the Unification Settlement at Puerta Leda. One participant shared that arriving at Leda was "like entering a different world, Leda is so clean, well-kept and full of an energy that is focused on transforming a 'forsaken land' into a land where families can experience the Kingdom of Heaven." The settlement began with True Parents initiative and the faithful response of Japanese National Messiahs in 1999. Today, the settlement has claim to a landmass larger than that of the city of Tokyo and its modern well-kept facilities, and ambitious innovations in fish farming, agriculture and animal husbandry stand as a reminder of what people can do when they unite with the heart and words of our True Parents.

The volunteers were introduced to the fish farming efforts being carried out at the Leda settlement. These efforts and advances have been made as an expression of the pioneer's desire to accomplish True Parents' direction that they create a model to address the scourge of world hunger. Volunteers actively netted hundreds of pounds of pacu in just one of the settlement's 23 ponds and then cleaned and prepared the fish for market. The nets being pulled required each participant to work together even as the water became deeper and deeper. Despite the difficulties, it was a very satisfying experience.

The volunteers also learned about taro and worked to harvest and clean these plants. The settlement contains many large fields of taro, which is a plant that tastes like potato but is significantly more nutritious. Taro is a root plant that multiplies generations of new plants from a mother plant. Each new plant that grows from the mother can feed a family for three days. The mother taro can create multiple generations of plants and they are easily harvested.

**The Pantanal Animal Park Project:** During their time at the Leda Settlement Leda the volunteers joined in the early stages of creating the Pantanal Animal Park. This is a relatively new project for the Leda Settlement and it has evolved out of True Parents' desire to ensure that nature in the Pantanal Region is conscientiously protected. Volunteers helped in the construction of a small bridge, the painting of a Welcome sign, grounds preparation and the planting of new grass and flowers. This visionary project will be part of future eco-tours in the region and it will provide visitors a better sense of the variety of animals in the region. The Pantanal is one of the last large tracts of land that is heavily populated by hundreds of species of fish, mammals and birds.

The original pioneers of Leda want to give the participants a taste of the "pioneer experience" by having them labor to clear land. They arranged that we cut and clear a small section of bush land. Blisters could be found on nearly every person's hands as the process of cutting trees and cleaning the area was intensive and physically taxing. After a morning of this hard labor, each participant gained a deeper appreciation of the effort and hard work that the settlers had invested. It was a sobering thought to realize that all the pioneers were over 50 years old when they began such a challenging task.

On the following day, the volunteers went out on boats and with rods and reels caught numerous fish in the Paraguay River. Participants commented that their experience fishing on the river was enjoyable and productive. Other highlights of the five-day stay were horseback riding, visiting Pig Land, the home for over 700 free range pigs and the tour of the facilities that include a home for True Parents and a large swimming pool for visitors.

While reflecting, participants thought through some of the things that Leda had taught them. Chiaki, a participant from the USA, shared, "This project helped me understand the importance in having a global heart that transcends cultural and language differences. It inspired me to want to contribute not just on a small scale but for the greater good." Joong Lee, a Korean-born third-generation participant who is currently living in the USA, shared, "This program taught me that any dream is possible as long as we persist. The Japanese pioneers at Leda started from the bottom, and now not only do they have enough for themselves but they help others. They could only do this by having a purpose harder than diamond that made them persevere through the challenges they had to face. As long we have a clear purpose and a "why" to doing the things we do, we can accomplish anything. Our accomplishments will only get as big as our dreams, so let's dream big. The program allows you to practice being a global citizen by helping the people in need and it teaches you to be the solution and not the victim of your situation."

The time at Leda was a time to reflect, work and regain a sense of confidence. It served to remind each volunteer that our dreams of creating a better society – one where people do Love God, Love Others, Love Nature, can be realized. We look forward to bring this experience to many others in the years ahead because it is one powerful way to help shape a culture of peace.

## **An Additional Note:**

### *Lessons On Unity*

The Universal Peace Federation International, the Family Federation for World Peace – South America and North America, and the South and North America Association for Sustainable Development and

World Peace are three organizations that share the same Founder, Rev. and Mrs. Sun Myung Moon. As part of their mission, these organizations are working in different ways to help establish in society the Founder's Vision for sustainable development and hunger eradication. The cooperation among the people representing these organizations was essential for a most successful 3rd Pathways to a Sustainable Future Project – a project which drew 22 volunteers from nine nations to serve the poorest and most abandoned part of Paraguay.

This cooperative spirit was mirrored between the Unification settlement at Leda and the community of Bahia Negra. Good working relationships developed and friendships grew through the cooperative efforts from representatives of different sectors of the municipality. The mayor, the Roman Catholic church, through the active local priest and the civic society, though the school director came together to launch a city-wide cleaning campaign "Clean city, clean hearts". The international volunteers would work to prepare and launch the project with the support of the school, the children and local families. Those involved in the campaign agreed to march under the banner "Love God, Love Others, Love Nature" and t-shirts were printed. The launching of the "Clean city, clean soul" campaign drew the support and participation of many of the community's families and set an example of what heaven requires of us – to love God, love others and love nature.