

FFWPU Europe and Middle East: Park Gyu-nam: Faith, Football, Public Service

Knut Holdhus
June 11, 2026



Park Gyu-nam praying outside Seongnam Ilhwa Chunma's football stadium, with the players in traditional club colors. Illustration: ChatGPT

세계일보

[Segye Ilbo](#)



[Segye Ilbo](#) Religious affairs reporter Jeong Seong-su (2025)

A case study in faith-based public engagement as Park Gyu-nam's life of religion, football (soccer), and social contribution is remembered

In a [column](#) published on 28th May 2026 in the South Korean daily [Segye Ilbo](#), religion correspondent Jeong Seong-su (정성수) reflects on the life and legacy of Park Gyu-nam (박규남), the former president of the professional football club Seongnam Ilhwa, who died on 25th May at the age of 89. Rather than focusing primarily on the club's many victories and trophies, Jeong presents Park as a figure whose life embodied the intersection of religious conviction, sports administration, and public service. The [article](#) is both a tribute and a reflection on the broader role that religiously motivated individuals and institutions have played in South Korean society.

See also [Architect of Seongnam Ilhwa's Amazing Success](#)

Park Gyu-nam (1937-2026) is remembered in Korean football history as the man who guided Seongnam Ilhwa Chunma (성남일화 천마) during one of the most successful periods ever achieved by a Korean professional football club. Under his leadership, the team won seven domestic and five international

titles and became synonymous with competitive excellence. Yet Jeong argues that Park's significance cannot be measured solely by championship records. What many former players, staff members, and observers recall most vividly is a deeply personal ritual that he performed before matches. Prior to kickoff, Park would walk seven times around the stadium, praying for the team and calling the names of coaches and players one by one.

According to the columnist, this practice reflected Park's belief in the biblical account of Joshua and the Israelites circling the city of Jericho seven times before its walls collapsed. For Park, the seven laps were not a superstition but an expression of faith and dedication. Football was not merely an occupation or business enterprise; it was a mission through which he believed he could serve others. Jeong uses this

image of the elderly club president praying around the pitch as a symbol of the values that guided his life.



From the Seonghwa ceremony for Park Gyu-nam (1937-2026) in Seoul May 28, 2026

The [article](#) emphasizes that Park did not come from a football background. He was neither a former player nor a coach. Instead, he had served as a [Unificationism](#) minister before being asked by its founder, [Sun Myung Moon](#) (문선명), in 1988 to help establish and manage a professional football club. Although he entered the sport with little technical knowledge, he gradually became one of the most influential administrators in Korean football.



Certificates awarded to Park Gyu-nam in honor of his accomplishments, displayed at his Seonghwa ceremony 28th May 2026. Both certificates have [Hak Ja Han](#)'s signature. The right certificate has a citation recognizing the completion of his course as a member of the 72 couples [blessed in marriage](#) by the [True Parents](#) in 1962 and a recognition of his victorious entrance into the heavenly realm. The left certificate contains a commemorative citation praising Park Gyu-nam for service and devotion connected with the [providence](#) and the restoration of the "[original homeland](#)" of humanity, the [Kingdom of Heaven](#).

During his quarter century of involvement with Seongnam Ilhwa, the club achieved remarkable success. It won multiple K League championships and continental titles while developing many players who later became household names in Korean football. Jeong notes that the club came to symbolize an era of winning football and contributed significantly to raising professional standards within the sport.

Park's influence extended beyond club management. He served for many years as a director of the Korea

Football Association and held various leadership positions within Korean professional football. He represented national teams at international tournaments and participated in football governance at the highest levels. The fact that he received distinguished service awards from the Korea Football Association on two occasions is presented as evidence that his contributions were recognized throughout the football community, regardless of his religious affiliation.

A major theme of Jeong's column is the relationship between religion and public life. Seongnam Ilhwa was long viewed by many Koreans as a "religious club" because of its connection to [Unificationism](#). The [article](#) recalls how Park and his colleagues often encountered suspicion and resistance when seeking corporate sponsorships or government approvals. Projects that appeared promising sometimes failed at the final stage, and plans for facilities associated with the club were occasionally blocked. Park reportedly remembered these experiences with sadness. Nevertheless, according to Jeong, he rarely blamed others and instead attributed setbacks to his own shortcomings. This attitude is presented as an example of humility and personal dignity.

The [column](#) also highlights what Jeong regards as the positive contributions made by the Tongil Group (통일그룹) [See editor's note below] and related organizations through sport. Beyond competitive success, Seongnam Ilhwa is credited with helping develop players, attracting spectators, and enhancing Korea's international football profile.



From the first Peace Cup in 2003, the match between Dutch club PSV Eindhoven and Nacional of Uruguay 18th July 2003

The [article](#) further points to international events such as the Peace Cup and Peace Queen Cup as examples of efforts to promote international understanding and peace through sport.

Particular attention is given to Park's commitment to maintaining football as an inclusive public space. Although he was a religious leader, he reportedly avoided imposing religious identity on the team. Players of different faiths were free to express their beliefs, and religious diversity within the squad was respected. Jeong interprets this as evidence that Park viewed sport not as a vehicle for religious promotion but as a sphere of public service capable of bringing people together across social and ideological boundaries.

The [article](#) concludes by recalling Park's final years. During discussions about transforming Seongnam Ilhwa into a citizen-owned club, his chief concern was that the name "Seongnam" should survive, preserving the team's historical connection to its community. Even in old age, he remained active in supporting members of his faith community facing difficulties. For Jeong, these actions reveal a man whose commitments to faith, football, and service remained constant throughout his life.

Ultimately, the [column](#) portrays Park Gyu-nam as more than a successful football executive. He is presented as a representative example of how religious conviction can inspire sustained engagement in public life. Through the image of an elderly man quietly walking seven laps around a football field in prayer, Jeong offers a portrait of dedication, perseverance, and a distinctive chapter in the history of both Korean football and modern Korean religion.

See also [Architect of Seongnam Ilhwa's Amazing Success](#)

Text: Knut Holdhus, editor

[Editor's note: The Tongil Group (통일그룹) is a South Korean business conglomerate founded by [Sun Myung Moon](#), the founder of [Unificationism](#) and the organization now known as the [Family Federation for World Peace and Unification](#). Established in the 1960s, the group was intended to provide an economic foundation for businesses inspired by [Sun Myung Moon's](#) religious and social vision.

Over the decades, Tongil Group has operated in a wide range of industries, including manufacturing, machinery, leisure and tourism, publishing, logistics, and finance. Among its better-known companies are Tongil Heavy Industries, which produces industrial machinery and defense-related equipment, and Ilhwa, known for health products, ginseng beverages, and bottled water. The group has also been involved in resorts, cultural projects, and media ventures.

Although the Tongil Group is historically connected to [Unificationism](#) through its [founder](#) and ownership structure, it functions as a commercial enterprise rather than a religious organization. Its relationship with the movement has often attracted public and political scrutiny in South Korea and abroad, particularly regarding governance, finances, and the extent of organizational ties between religious and business activities. Today, Tongil Group remains one of the most prominent business networks associated with [Unificationism](#).]

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Court proceedings focus on key contradictions as defense presents evidence and witness accounts in 12th June hearing attended by Mother Han (83)



Kim Dong-yeon (김동연), Vice-President, *Family Federation for World Peace and Unification* in South Korea.

Extracts from a [briefing](#) 13th June 2026 by Rev. Kim Dong-yeon (김동연), Vice-President, *Family Federation for World Peace and Unification* in South Korea. Translated from Korean. Originally published by the Culture and Public Relations Office on the [website](#) of the Korean chapter of the *Family Federation (FFWPU)*.

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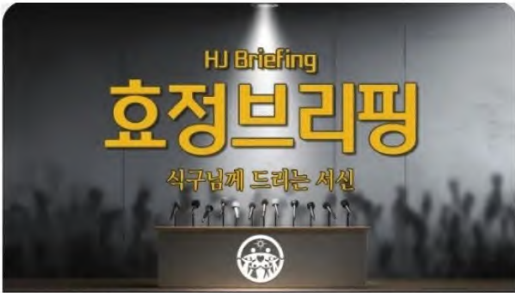
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South Korea. Screenshot from video by FFWPU 17th Jan. 2026.

[Declines to Testify](#)

[True Mother](#) has gradually regained

strength and was finally able to appear in court on 12th June. We would like to provide a summary of her actions and the progress of the court proceedings, undertaken after she rose from her sickbed in order to reveal the truth.



From the [website](#) of the Korean chapter of the [Family Federation](#) (FFWPU).

True Mother’s Testimony and the Key Issues of the Hearing

Appearing in person at the 12th June hearing, [True Mother](#) stated immediately after taking the witness oath:

“I have never given 100 million won to Kweon Seong-dong (권성동). I have never given gifts to the President’s wife, Kim Keon-hee (김건희). Nor have I ever provided money as political funds to politicians.”

With these words, she firmly and clearly denied the core allegations contained in the indictment. She further made clear that the current situation originated from the false claims and misrepresentations of the [former headquarters director](#).

The defense team then focused on demonstrating that the special prosecutors had distorted the [Family Federation](#)’s distinctive religious concepts of “[Cheonil-guk](#)” (천일국) and “*national restoration*” (국가복귀) [[See editor’s note below](#)] into secular political lobbying.



Yoon Yeong-ho, former international HQ director of the [Family Federation](#). Here, 6th Dec. 2020. Screenshot from Peacelink TV

The defense also concentrated on establishing, as a matter of law, that the case arose from the [former headquarters director](#)’s unilateral working methods and personal misconduct.

In particular, the defense argued that the [former headquarters director](#) habitually carried out actions without prior approval and then reported them afterward only if they produced results, maintaining an arbitrary and independent style of operation. Most significantly, they identified what they described as a decisive contradiction: the “Special Report” file from the

relevant date, presented as key evidence, reportedly contains no reference whatsoever to providing funds to former lawmaker Kweon Seong-dong (권성동). Through this, the defense sought to undermine the opposing side’s claims.

The defense continues to argue before the court that this case represents a crime committed independently by the [former headquarters director](#) – who was once the most powerful official of our [religious organization](#) – in order to maintain his influence and accumulate personal wealth through the misuse of funds of our [religious organization](#), and that there was no instruction from or conspiracy involving [True Mother](#).

Testimony from Key Individuals Supporting the Defense’s Position

During the recent trial proceedings, the principal arguments advanced by the defense have been further substantiated through the detailed testimony of witnesses who were responsible for finances and practical operations at the time, making the factual circumstances of the case clearer.

A former executive who had worked closely with the [former headquarters director](#) in planning activities testified that “[True Mother](#)’s actual statements and the direction of activities of [Yoon Yeong-ho](#) (윤영호) did not align with one another.” The witness further alleged that [Yoon](#) distributed a separate internal guideline called “Interpretation of the Word”, which reinterpreted and imposed [True Mother](#)’s sincere religious messages according to his own preferences in order to justify his independent actions. According to the briefing, this testimony demonstrates that the affair resulted

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the briefing, this testimony demonstrates that the trial resulted from personal misconduct carried out in [True Mother's](#) name.

A former executive responsible for finances at the World Headquarters testified that funds disbursed immediately before the presidential election were executed not on [True Mother's](#) instructions but on direct orders from the [former headquarters director](#). The witness further stated that, according to the regulations of the [religious organization](#), the amount in question could legally be approved solely by the headquarters director, reinforcing the argument that the actions were carried out independently.

Staff members who were responsible for accounting subsequently testified that the [former headquarters director](#) and his spouse received reimbursement twice for luxury purchases and personal expenses amounting to tens or even hundreds of millions of won [[10 million won = ca. 7,250 US dollars](#)]. They also alleged indications of personal embezzlement. Furthermore, it was pointed out that there had been a practice of requesting budget allocations for items such as mission-support expenses without attaching specific supporting documentation, resulting in opaque funding requests. It was also revealed that, within a rigid top-down hierarchical structure, non-transparent expenditures of funds were carried out among operational staff.

See also [Mother Han Delivers 10-Minute Court Statement](#)

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Featured image above: Special prosecutors distorting the [Family Federation's](#) distinctive religious concepts of “[Cheonil-guk](#)” ([천일국](#)) and “national restoration” ([국가복귀](#)). Illustration: ChatGPT, 14th June 2026.



Kept long-term in tiny cell under inhuman conditions: [Hak Ja Han](#), the [True Mother](#), here on 27th March 2026 after more than 6 months in detention cell. Photo: [FFWPU](#)

[Editor's note: In the context of [Hak Ja Han](#) and the [Family Federation for World Peace and Unification](#) (FFWPU), “national restoration” ([국가복귀](#), [국가복원](#), or related terms often translated as “restoration of the nation”) is primarily a religious and [providential](#) concept, not simply a political one.

The challenge – and the point raised in the [briefing](#) – is that prosecutors and the defense appear to disagree about whether references to “national restoration” should be understood as religious objectives or as political activities.

When [Hak Ja Han](#) speaks of “national restoration”, she is generally referring to the goal of [Unificationism](#) to transform a nation so that it reflects [God's ideal](#) and becomes part of the realization of [Cheonil-guk](#) (Kingdom of Heaven), rather than simply winning political influence or supporting particular politicians. Whether specific activities undertaken in pursuit of that goal crossed into political lobbying is precisely what seems to be contested in the proceedings described in the [briefing](#).]

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