

Interview of Missionary Mary Johnson

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Mary first went to the Central African Republic (1975–1983) before going on to other mission fields.



Mary Johnson

Question: True Peace: What was preparing to be a missionary like?

I'd been a member for two years in 1975. Father often came to speak to us at Barrytown, where we prepared to go out.

When I prayed I got this feeling, not necessarily from Heavenly Parent, but a strong feeling that though I hadn't heard of this country before, this is a wonderful country. If you looked at the statistics, The Central African Republic was one of the poorest countries in the world, then ruled by a cruel dictator. At Barrytown a huge map on the wall showed which countries in the world were communist, which countries were not and which countries were trending toward communism.

We got a strong sense from Father that we were going out to try to stop the tide of communism. In 1975, communism was dominant and aggressive.

Father told us to stay in our country for three years and to unite with the other missionaries. Uniting sounded easy. We all love True Parents. We were to love our

country as Jesus loved Israel and walk every path with the same heart that Jesus had had.

The German brother was very organized; he had already found a tiny apartment where we could stay.

From there we just started. We were always thinking we have to go out to witness but we can't do anything that would get us kicked out of the country.

Question: What was the greatest challenge?

It was very hot. The diet and the language were also difficult, but these, step by step, you can overcome.

I was not prepared for how difficult it would be to unite with my German and Japanese brothers!

We set up something at the beginning that I think was our salvation.

Every morning, we would get up and pray first and again every night before we slept. We sang the holy songs. The German brother and I in English, the Japanese brother in Japanese.

In so many ways, it was very difficult to unite. Should we do a workshop or not? How should we witness? These things should be easy, but we always had to discuss them. Father had said we were going to be restoring World War II, but my generation did not know the bitterness of World War II.

The German brother always wanted everything well organized. The Japanese brother and I probably conflicted the most. He sometimes said, "I've never met sisters like you," meaning American sisters are so outspoken.

Finally, we began using a system of each of us being the central figure for a week. This included everything -- like going to the market to buy food and cooking. The person in charge became a servant of servants. That was how we could begin to make unity.

Lady Dr. Kim (Shin Wook Kim) came to Africa, I think because she had received information spiritually that many of the missionaries were struggling. When she started talking to us, she said, It has been very difficult for you during these three years, right? We all looked around and we realized that all the brothers and sisters in other countries had been going through the same thing. We suddenly understood that Father was right; we were restoring the past.

So we taught and we witnessed. I think one of the funniest things is that the Japanese brother would use a

bit of French to say to any young person he met, "Do you like Karate?" He did not say he could teach karate, but he was Japanese.

Many Central African Republic young men would come with him to our center and we would teach them the Principle.



Certificate of merit recipients with True Mother -- Mary Johnson is on the far left

Question: What was the greatest blessing?

The greatest blessing took me a while to realize. You know Central African Republic was incredibly poor to the eye -- very few people had cars, some had little mopeds or used bicycles, most people walked. Many people's socks -- even their shoes -- wouldn't match, but I realized the heart of these people, the heart that followed the Japanese brother and would listen to us, embrace us, was so remarkable.

Even though they did not figure out what we were doing there, they never judged us. Through the years I realized, this is so beautiful. Because the kingdom of heaven is a kingdom of heart. Gradually I begin to understand that that was why I received in prayer, You're going to a very wonderful country.

In Central Africa, some members came two or three times to a workshop before they really got it. I remember one young man who studied three times, then he went away and we never saw him again.

Of course, we could not contact him, no mobile phones back then! Two years later, all of a sudden, he walked into the center. He said, "I went back to the village but I couldn't forget." Now he is still a member, blessed, with a family.

Question: What gives you the most hope for our movement to succeed?

For me it is the second generation.

They have so much talent, so much energy. We were trying to make unity, you know, Japanese, German and American, but now most of those in the second generation have one parent that is American and one parent that is Japanese, or one who is Austrian and one that is American. For them, this type of world is natural. That is why I think the movement will succeed.

Question: What would you like to implement for the benefit of our church in the future?

I think it would be amazing if we could give an opportunity for many in our second generation to go out to another country. If that became our church tradition after secondary school or after two years of university, young people would go out for a year.

I was in Nigeria in 2013 when four young Japanese second-generation members came. One of them had grown up wanting to be a missionary, but for the other three it was farthest thing from their minds.

How coming to Nigeria transformed them was amazing to see. Only one could speak English, the others depended on the one who could. These Japanese brothers would go out and say, "We are having a one-

day workshop next Saturday" and they would bring fifty people.

Question: What advice would I give to a young person going out?

What I found in Central Africa was that there is so much to learn if we get beyond the external reality, that the people are poor.... I would advise, go out to listen!

Yet there also needs to be some structure. Service projects are good, because they can attract people to come and listen to who we are.

Some people have gone out, maybe on RYS programs, for two or three weeks. They have a deep experience, but if you go out for a year, it is very different. You are no longer just visiting; you are really living there.

The mobile phone revolution has changed Africa, even in economically challenged countries. If I went out again I would try to use that in a positive way. But we have to go out with the same heart -- listening, learning from them, trying to understand their point of view. I would take advantage of the internet, and communications, but still go out with the same heart.