

## **In June Sung-Jong Choi was appointed in my stead as European Youth Department director**

Geros Kunkel  
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Dear European Leaders, dear European Blessed Families,

In June Sung-Jong Choi was appointed in my stead as European Youth Department director. None of the European Youth Department staff were present at his inauguration. We have been trying to have a chance as European Youth Department staff (Orlande Schenk, Patrick Hanna, Miwha Hanna, Julius Alexy, Martin Alexy, Garrun Abrahams, Grace and myself) to meet with our European leadership (Pres. Yong Cheon Song, Tim Miller and Jack Corley). But we have been denied this opportunity. In the summer we chose to focus on the summer projects. Since then in recent communications it has been made clear to us, that Pres. Song is not willing to meet with us and the decisions made, which we do not support, will not be reconsidered. As I therefore leave my mission as European Youth Department director, I would like to have a chance to express my views of what happened and my conclusions. These are just my personal experiences and the conclusions I have drawn from them.

In 2011 as we were preparing to put together the STF year 2011-2012 Pres. Song had expressed his wish for me to move on in my mission. Originally he wanted me to become local Pastor and then National Leader (Hyung Jin Nim's course). I had expressed that I was not so much interested to become a pastor, as I did not see myself in such a role. He then suggested I should move on to supporting UPF work. I felt this was closer to what I would like to do and was grateful that Pres. Song was considering my situation and was flexible. We then made a plan for the STF year 2011-2012 together, which was to be a year in which I was to prepare someone to take on my mission, so that after this transition year I could move on.

In addition he had expressed he wished Julius and Martin Alexy also to move on. For this he gave no real explanation, only that he feels they should focus more on Slovakia. He had expressed his desire for them to move on ever since I was appointed European Youth Department director in 2009. I always explained why they are needed in our European Youth Department work and Pres. Song accepted it. Nevertheless he continuously pressured me to remove them.

Our plan for 2011-2012 was for me to continue being European Youth Department director, Garrun to stay for a third year as STF director together with Grace as Vice director (she only committed to 6 months), Orlande to lead the ESGD team with Martin, Miwha and Julius, who would also run DONE. Patrick was the one who from the beginning wanted to work with us with the perspective of taking over a bigger mission. The ESGD had already approached Patrick in 2010 and during the year when he was UK YD leader he has been supporting European activities. We therefore moved him to Germany for the first three months and gave him opportunities during the year to work in all our areas, from ESGD, Blessing, STF, DONE, etc... In order to make the transition we were hoping to find more people to work with us, as at the start of the year we only had Patrick as a real option to continue our work. We sent out memos, talked to people and tried to find suitable candidates to commit to longer than 1 year and to take on a bigger role in the European Youth Department. But we were only able to find people willing to commit short term.

While making plans for the period 2012-2013, knowing that Orlande and Miwha will finish their missions in Summer 2012 and also Garrun returning to the US after 3 years of being STF director, there were only 3 people left in the core team (Julius Alexy, Martin Alexy and myself). Since Pres. Song adamantly wanted all 3 of us to move on and we only had Patrick to replace us, it was very difficult to see how the coming year would work. Early in 2012 I had a meeting with Pres. Song in which I expressed our difficulty finding suitable committed people, especially for the difficult position of STF director. Pres. Song then expressed to me in person, that if we cannot find people, it would be ok for us to continue. He even suggested Julius could possibly be STF director. After this meeting I was encouraged, as I felt less pressure and we could possibly be more free in finding a solution for the European Youth Department and STF year 2012-2013. We continued looking for people and resending out the memo looking for staff and an STF director. We were also in discussion with potential candidates in Europe, in the US and Australia.

At our next European Youth Department staff meeting in April when discussing the situation, we felt we need to come up with a proposal, as it is time to start preparing the European Youth Department and STF year 2012-2013. We put together a proposal, in which after long discussion and evaluating our situation, we concluded that it would be best Patrick takes the role of STF director, as this is one of the most crucial positions, running the main full-time education program. Even though Patrick was not so confident, we thought this would be the best and after 12 years of STF we also thought it would be a good chance to change the program a bit. We wanted it to start in January after DONE. Also discussing and evaluating with Garrun and Grace the STF program we wanted to change the nature of the program slightly. For my situation the proposal included me staying in the European Youth Department director role to oversee the

transition but only as a part time. I would focus my time to work with and support UPF Germany as a preparation to possibly take on further roles in UPF-Europe.

In this proposal we would have a smaller staff, after Garrun, Orlande and Miwha leave and me becoming part time. But we felt confident with these adjustments and changes we could prepare and run the European Youth Department activities for 2012-2013 while still looking for staff to enlarge the team. There were several people committed to join the European Youth Department team on part time basis or even full time basis but not taking on main leadership roles yet.

This proposal was presented to Pres. Song by Tim Miller and we got a flat out rejection with no explanation. From this point on it was made clear to us, that we should not be involved in putting together the future STF program and also in finding a new European Youth Department director.

We wanted to know why the proposal was not even considered, what we could improve, etc. but we got no clear reply. We had asked for a chance to meet European leadership but even though we were told we could come and we booked tickets, last minutes the meeting was cancelled. Later Pres. Song chose to only meet with Patrick, me and Julius and Martin separately. After meeting Patrick he chose not to work with Patrick any more, without a clear reason and explanation. Until then we believed Patrick was the best suited and best prepared candidate. We believed European leadership was also of that opinion.

In the meeting with me, Pres. Song praised me elaborately but then announced he had decided Sung Jong would become European Youth Department director. I was not asked about my input and not given the chance to say anything at that point. Until then Sung Jong was never mentioned or considered as a candidate. Shortly after that meeting I received a call that the transition needs to take place in June, instead of at the end of the academic year (August/September). A leaders meeting in June was announced and we were invited to attend it. We all planned our flights to UK again and were hoping to be able to meet with our European leadership and voice our concern about these decisions. But then last minute the meeting was changed due to Kook Jin Nim's UK visit. Because of summer workshops starting most of our staff was not able to come to the new dates. We informed Tim Miller and asked again to meet on the original dates, one week before the leaders meeting, since we were all available and already had flights. We were told clearly there is no time to meet us. After all the handover therefore took place in our complete absence.

Although there has been a public version of why and how the handover was good and necessary and "heavens will", privately we have come to hear that our European Leadership have started in private to spread false accusations towards me and the European Youth Department staff, regarding having a bad attitude, dividing 1st and 2nd gen, misusing public money, being disunited, etc.... I have since come to experience how leaders and parents, I considered friends no longer were willing to greet me or communicate with me and an atmosphere has spread, that we as European Youth Department needed to be changed because of gross misconduct. We were never confronted by our leadership about any of these issues. If we have made any such mistakes, why were we not confronted by our leadership, why do they resort to gossiping behind our backs with vague accusations and insubstantial claims? We have asked our European leadership to explain why such information has been coming from them, but have received no answer until this day.

During the past year there was another issue, that I believe is also part of the reason this change was forced through and the decision was made to replace me at all costs. In the past 3 years we as European Youth Department have tried to focus our efforts to take care of and find a way to support especially the elder 2nd gen in Europe (18 and older, but especially 24 and older). For this SAWS 18+ was founded. We felt the best way to approach this generation is to help them integrate into the church as members of our community. Many elder 2nd gen are not so much involved in our movement after they reach the age of about 24, because the movement is not so attractive to them. So it would require an honest deep reflection about ourselves and how we operate.

At National leaders meetings we had tried to address this issue. STF had tried to put more emphasis on witnessing in western countries, although this has turned out to be very difficult, because of lack of support, so we moved back to focus on Witnessing in Albania and other countries. Nevertheless, we have been trying to put this point on the agenda and the ESGD has been focusing on communicating with national Youth communities and the respective National Leaders to help bring forth a better integration. It was hard, as at leaders meetings, we always had only a short slot to give a report. There was never an adequate time allocated where we could present a prepared report and also bring along some elder 2nd gen to share their experiences.

In summer 2011 I had an accident and missed a National Leaders meeting. At this meeting there was time allocated to discuss the elder youth issues and National Leaders came up with the idea to restart CARP (again) and to appoint a CARP leader in each nation to start witnessing on campuses and at the same time to start with Youth UPF. So basically a top-down approach was decided to appoint youth to do the UPF and the church work. Until then, knowing the situation of the youth in the different nations, we had tried

to encourage and work with an approach of working with the youth and the different situations in the different nations and support a smoother transition into the existing church structure, rather than once again appointing CARP leaders and putting pressure on them to mobilize the youth. This approach has been done many times before and it has led many youth to be disengaged.

I had expressed my concern about this approach, as I am aware many 2nd gen are not comfortable with this. Until today, I believe most nations have not been able to appoint a CARP leader. Just before the National Leaders meeting in Portugal (Feb 2012) we had our first opportunity as European Youth Department staff to Meet Pres. Song in Person together and share our views and concerns. The atmosphere of the meeting was good, we felt we could honestly express our concerns, Pres. Song listened and we were encouraged, because we felt supported and trusted by Pres. Song.

At the National Leaders meeting in Portugal (February 2012) I was able in a short presentation to mention the "elephant in the room", the fact that most 2nd gen after reaching the age of about 24 are becoming distant and disengaged from our movement.

I have tried at subsequent National Leaders meetings to gain a bigger time slot of at least 2, better 4 hours to bring some elder 2nd gen there and have a chance to address the issue with the National leaders. At the next 2 meetings, I was denied that opportunity, as there are always more important things on the agenda. Nevertheless, I tried to strongly express that National Leaders should talk with 2nd gen, not just about them. But I have come to experience that our leadership is not really interested in dealing with this matter.

Therefore from these experiences and my involvement over many years I have drawn the conclusions:

- Our European leadership is not able to discern well intended criticism from ill intended criticism; therefore there is no chance for development or a healthy growth, as critical voices are generally dismissed as disunited or negative.
- Our European leadership is not serious about engaging and giving room to 2nd gen. It is only lip service.
- Most National leaders are aware of the situation regarding the European Youth Department and the general 2nd gen community in Europe that is on the minds of many Blessed Families but they are indifferent or complacent to allow space to address the issues.

Once again, these are my personal experiences and the conclusions I have drawn from working many years in vain within the structure to represent the 2nd gen to our leadership.

Sincerely,

Geros Kunkel