

On Being a Woman in the Unification Church

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1978



Nora and Hugh Spurgin with Ameri, Andrea, and Christopher

Being a Woman

Last year I had an interview with a reporter from Newsweek. During the interview, the reporter, a young woman, said she was impressed that I as a mother of three children was able to live such a busy, exciting life and to do so much traveling. She said she felt that many women felt unfulfilled and restless in their roles as wives and mothers and she was glad to see the Unification Church giving opportunities to women.

I smiled, because I was thinking that my mission did allow me to do many exciting things, did free me from the day-to-day care of children. But because the Divine Principle has taught us the value of the family unit and the deep internal significance of womanhood and parenthood, my "freedom" was also the source of so many tears and a burdened heart. That reporter had no way of knowing that what she saw as freedom was a burden of heart which we, as Unification Church women, bear for the sake of the world.

Being a Wife

I feel that the Women's Liberation movement in America has created a generation of women who are unwilling to make the sacrifices necessary for motherhood and family life. If there is no real commitment, then one is only seeking that which requires nothing but brings a selfish kind of joy; it's impossible to find. The Unification Church teaches us, rather, that the greater the sacrifice, the greater the value. I feel this is so true of marriage -- to begin with the faith that we have not been given an already-perfect marriage, but that we're committed to making it a perfect marriage. The love grows deeper in the making of the marriage. There is such beauty in the creating of a unit that has an identity which transcends the two individuals who make it up.

I was 32 when we were blessed. I had lived a very independent and interesting life, and at first it was difficult for me to unite my whole life with another person. I wondered, do I as an "object" have to give up my whole identity, my own achievements, and become just an addendum to my husband? At first I often found myself competing with him. Then I gradually began to realize that we had so much more to offer as a unit and that it was not just one but both who gained when we as a couple could be successful.

When I became an itinerant worker I realized how dependent I had become on my husband. He is very different from me. He is vertical, I am horizontal; he is goal-directed, I am process-oriented. So when I needed to make a decision in the field, sometimes I would call him for advice. I would always be amazed. I was good at seeing the total picture, but I needed him to help make a clear direction.

I returned and worked with my husband, who was an IOWC Commander then, for one year, and after that I returned to itinerant work. The second time I realized that I no longer called my husband as much for advice, because by then I knew his way of thinking and I could observe things from my point of view and then from his point of view. To me, this is one of the most exciting things about marriage. We become bigger people in order to serve God as we serve each other.

Once Mrs. Won Pok Choi said that the more unlike husband and wife are, the greater the number of people they can embrace between the two of them as they come to love each other. How much Father must see in store for each of us when he matches us.

Being a Mother

Becoming a mother requires not just commitment to another adult, but commitment to the care and molding of the lives of children. Our hearts certainly must grow and expand with each new child. I always think, once one has a child, one's life is never emotionally free of that child. So the loves are deeper and the sorrows more intense. This truly is the road to the perfection of our hearts -- to experience these depths of emotion -- and only in this way can we understand God's heart and become one with Him.

It is love that makes the care of a child a service of joy rather than of duty. Certainly one could feel like a slave to the demands of a child if one did not love the child. I remember with my first baby how I used to lie awake at night hoping that my baby would wake up so I could feed her. If I hadn't loved her so much I would have dreaded night feedings.

I feel that the love between a mother and child is an almost inseparable bond.

Reconciling the Family Mission with the Large Mission

I can remember distinctly the first time Father sent out American itineraries, choosing five women to travel in the states. I was due to have my first baby in one month and was not chosen. The joy of making a little home in our Center for our new baby was mingled with the reality that there was so much need on the front line. We cared for Toby Fernsler while his mother went out to do itineraries. As a new wife and mother, I was now confronted with caring for my spiritual mother's husband and child as well as my own. That was a heart-stretcher. I knew I must love and serve them even more than my own.

Once while I was nursing my baby, I looked into the beautiful, longing eyes of Toby, who was then a year and a half old. I wondered how I could love him more than my own child, how I could make him the "Abel child" in my heart. Gradually my heart grew until I could find room for two children. Then one year later I had my second baby, and I had to stretch to include three. Recently, after four years, I was visiting the Fernslers in Washington, D.C. When Toby came home from school, I suddenly felt as if I were still his mother. When I realized how much I loved him, tears came to my eyes, and I thanked God for the most precious opportunity I had had to care for him at a time when his mother was sacrificing him for a national mission.

During the one and a half years I was living with my husband and children in a Center, there was always some conflict in my heart, and I wondered many times how I could make each day have eternal value. Then my time came to sacrifice my family for a national mission. I left my two children in the Center in the care of one of the women and went out as an itineraries worker. The adjustment was hard at first. There in the corner of the sisters' room in a small center, after everyone else had fallen asleep, I quietly cried in loneliness, my arms aching to hold those babies I had left behind.

I realized how much I had related to people as a mother with children. Suddenly I felt naked, without them, and I had to learn again how to relate as an individual. The role of itineraries worker was fulfilling, however, and I soon began to see how much parenting had prepared me for this role, how much I had to and could extend my heart from my own family to the larger mission. Being a wife and mother had taught me so much about relating to and dealing with both leaders and members. Because I had learned to work side-by-side with my husband without competing for power, I could apply the same principle to the state leaders with whom I worked.

After four years of traveling, I have just recently begun to establish a home for our three children and care for and educate them. It is again an adjustment, and I want to rise to meet the challenge of educating them to be exemplary citizens of the Kingdom of Heaven on earth. Children are resilient and I am always amazed at the strength of our family identity in spite of the separations. Recently, Andrea, my five-year-old daughter, said, "Mommy, the children at the nursery are like my brothers and sisters, but this is my family!"

I pray that as daughters of the family of God, we can become wives and mothers that our True Parents can be proud of; that we can rise to meet the challenges of whatever we are called to do; and above all, that our faith may carry us through the restoration into the ideal.