

## For the Sake of the Nation The Development of Character Education in Nigeria

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May 2016



*True Mother and members of her entourage in Abuja, Nigeria with Nigerian members*

It all began with True Mother's visit to Nigeria in December 1993. True Mother was then on a forty-nation speaking tour proclaiming "True Parents and the Completed Testament Age" and Abuja, Nigeria was one of her stops. After a momentous speech to some one thousand five hundred Nigerian dignitaries at the Hilton Hotel, Abuja, she addressed church members at a victory celebration, charging them to bring victory at the next blessing that would be held in 1995 (for 360,000 couples). She said she was having everyone in the world stand at the same starting line for a new beginning and that she trusted that the Nigerian members would come out tops in the race. She then gave Nigeria the goal of ten thousand couples for the next Blessing Ceremony in 1995.

After True Mother had left, under the guidance of Kathy Rigney, then regional director, church leaders began to brainstorm to figure out how to reach the huge goal. They realized that by conventional witnessing alone, reaching it would be very difficult. They decided it would be best to witness to Christian churches and bring whole congregations to the blessing.

To convince the churches to accept the blessing, we had present it as a practical solution to the rampaging AIDS crisis at the time. The core message, derived from the Divine Principle lecture on the Human Fall, being—"chastity before marriage and fidelity in marriage."

### **Serving the nation**

Incidentally, apart from some token government effort, the unification movement found itself among very few groups doing any form of serious AIDS awareness campaign at the grassroots in the country at the time. As this was seen as an important service to the nation, HIV/AIDS education became a stand-alone program on the list of unification movement activities. That was a shift from AIDS campaign for blessing in churches and rural communities to a full-scale HIV/AIDS education program in secondary and tertiary institutions.

For its pioneering effort in this area, in 2000, the Lagos State government under the auspices of the state Ministry of Health invited the unification movement, represented by Michael Kiely, our national messiah and me, as education director, to join its action committee on AIDS and Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STDs).

This was the first such committee in the country. In 2002, the federal government was to constitute a similar committee at the national level, drawing the bulk of its leadership from the Lagos Action Committee. The national committee later matured into what is now the National Agency for the Control of AIDS (NACA).

The unification movement's HIV/AIDS activism in Nigeria spanned ten years, 1995–2005. We reached hundreds of thousands of students in about a thousand schools across the country. Official figures showed that the HIV/AIDS prevalence rate became significantly lower in the southwestern states of Nigeria, which enjoyed more intensive intervention than the other states in Southern Nigeria.

## Our national role changes

Nigeria is an amalgam of more than two hundred ethnic groups of various sizes struggling to stay together as a nation. Transition from many years of military rule to democracy (1984–1999) in the fourth republic, had its side effects in that the greater freedom of expression inherent in a democracy was wont to manifest violently in an environment where people with divergent loyalties must struggle for access to political power, in order to gain control of scarce resources. Therefore, the country experienced quite a bit of restiveness in the early years of the fourth republic, all through the 2000s.

A critical reassessment of the unification movement’s social engagement effort, therefore, showed the need to move from the narrow area of HIV/AIDS education to the broader area of character education; in other words, we upgraded HIV/AIDS education to character education, in order to address other social malaise such as drug abuse and all forms of violent crimes.



*In 1993, True Mother receiving flowers from blessed children in Nigeria*

### Heavenly influence

The impetus for a concerted character education program in Nigeria again came from our True Mother’s visit, together with Hyo Jin nim, in 2006 during their 180-nation world tour, that year, to proclaim “God’s Ideal Family and the Kingdom of the Peaceful, Ideal World.”

The then governor of Bayelsa State, Dr. Goodluck Ebele Jonathan sponsored that event, which took place at the Nicon-Luxury Hotel, in Abuja. He and his wife with some one hundred and twenty other dignitaries received the blessing on that occasion, officiated by True Mother and Hyo Jin nim. After the event, Governor Jonathan invited a team of UPF

character educators led by Kathy Rigney and Kevin Winter (of blessed memory) to his state to run a statewide character education program in secondary schools, 2006–2007, under the direct auspices of the governor’s office.

Governor Jonathan’s intention was to stem the tide of violent agitation and militancy at the root in Bayelsa State in particular and the Niger Delta region in general. In 2007 he became vice-president of the nation and in 2009, following the death in office of President Yar’ Adua, he became president of the Federal Republic of Nigeria and in 2011 he was elected substantive president.

The unification movement’s character education was appealing to President Jonathan not only in the sense of personal character building but in the promotion of a unique sense of patriotism toward the nation. The idea that the individual should live for a higher purpose—especially in uplifting and preserving the nation rather than the pursuit of sectional interests—is an important catch. Another important catch is that the Unificationist character education presentations have a lot of spiritual power. They are spiritually invigorating and have an interfaith appeal. The presentations identify with traditional values cherished by the various religions and ethnic groups. This was also a key factor toward the success of our HIV/AIDS education. High government officials, school administrators and teachers have testified to this fact. Even die-hard militants who received the character education lectures have confessed that our group was the first group that taught them in a manner that touched their hearts, so they were always willing to listen.

Recognizing Character education as a critical tool for social engagement by the unification movement is very important. In Nigeria our goal is that unification movement’s brand of character education ultimately becomes the mainstream curriculum at all levels of the educational system. That is why the focus is now on training teachers to acquire the knowledge and skills to deliver character education in order to have the required manpower for massive nationwide programs. Although teacher-training programs are still at the pilot stage, interest is high among stakeholders at various levels of leadership. If we ride on that wave of interest, we will surely reach our desired destination—Cheon Il Guk.