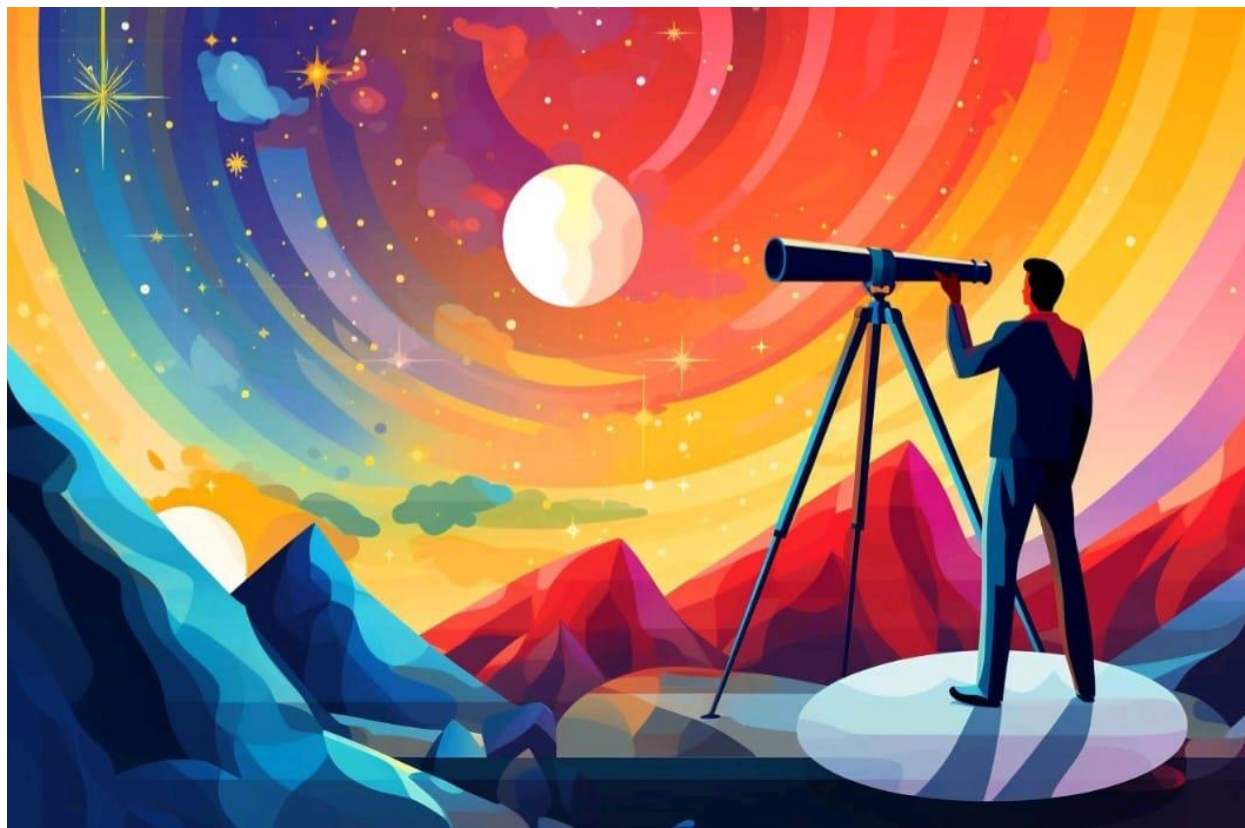


FFWPU UK: Highlights From Bogdan and Yoshiko's Journey In 2023

Michael Balcomb
January 31, 2024



A Year Of Growth And Reflection: Highlights From Bogdan and Yoshiko's Journey In 2023

Our Vice-Presidents of FFWPU Europe invite you to reflect on the significant events and stories that defined 2023. From enriching retreats and workshops to impactful initiatives and blessings, the year unfolded with growth, reflection, and a strengthened dedication to the vision of True Parents.

Main events and stories

January: Reflecting and Planning



The year started with the German Young Leaders Retreat, a meeting envisioned the summer before together with Gabriel and Amelia L., Vice-Presidents of FFWPU Germany. The aim of the meeting was to bring young people together to discuss the future of our movement in Germany and grow together as Team Germany.

One week later our family drove again to Camberg for the HJ Staff retreat. Although the purpose of the meeting was a bit unclear in the beginning (does it deal with youth and young adults of FFWPU overall or more specifically with the HJ Youth Academy?), the meeting brought tangible results.

Also, in January (and continuing into February) we had our annual review meetings with the FFWPU and IAYSP staff we directly work with. This was helpful as we could sharpen job descriptions, learn from the past and set goals. The review meetings also helped some to realise that it was time for them to move on. I'd like to thank Godwin C. (IAYSP South Europe) and Miguel A. (IAYSP West Europe and France) for their investment in IAYSP over the last few years.

The clearest lessons from the 12 people that participated in the 360 Annual Review of Yoshiko and me

was that we need to get much more organised and communicate more clearly and punctually. Over the year we took active steps towards this. We are looking forward to our review meetings next month, to see whether this internal change is already visible with our team and co-workers.

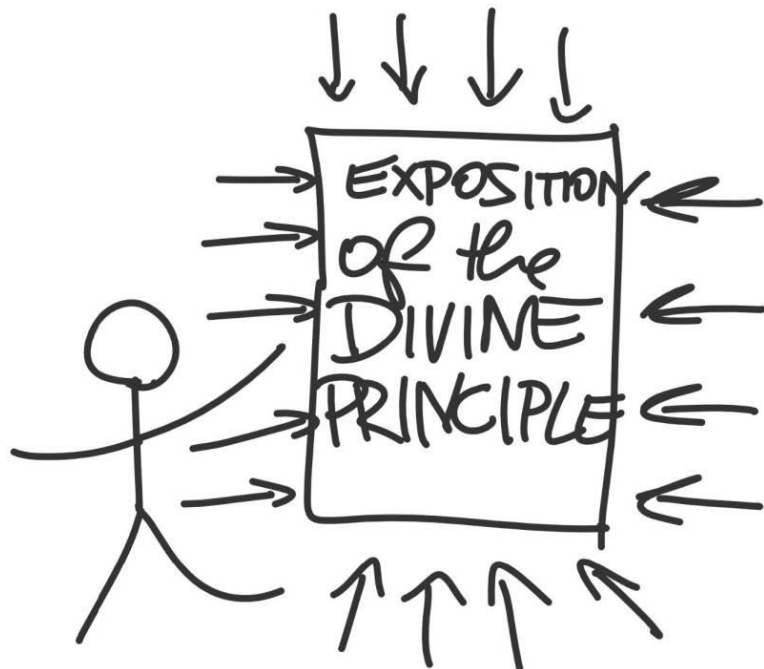


February: Truth

In February I attended the 7-Day Divine Principle WS in Prague. It meant being away from my family for the semester holidays. This was tough as I spent about 3.5h commuting each day - by train and bus from Steyr to Linz and back, 4 days a week. The workshop was a profound gift. Dr. Hanna's lectures, and the spirit of the programme gave me fresh insight.

This started a (still ongoing) cycle of 40-Day Divine Principle reading conditions, reading through the DP in 40 days, 10 pages a day (English version). The Divine Principle is a gift that keeps on giving. Reading books on principled leadership alongside the DP (especially *The Anatomy of Peace, Self-Deception and Leadership*, *The Outward Mindset* and *Principles: Work and Life*) put me on a journey to realize how crucial it is to translate Heavenly Parent's Divine Principles into my principles as a guide for daily actions.

In February, I also went to Bratislava (Slovakia) to meet part of the ESGD team. It was a respectful and in many regards helpful exchange. At the same time the High Noon team toured Europe. Andreas P. took on the mission of leading EMPOWER, 6 young volunteers went to Lebanon for witnessing and were hosted by the wonderful George P. and Sarah A. (VPs Middle East).



It's worth the re-read!

March: Balkans and Blessing

Alongside the exam season in school, I travelled to the Balkans (Kosovo, North Macedonia and Serbia) to prepare our big IAYSP Balkans event in May and initiate new partnerships. In North Macedonia we could also meet with an MP from the cross-party parliamentary working group on youth policy. The Balkans are such a crucial area for us to invest in. Tensions have been rising due to the war in Ukraine, but it is not too late for civil society to take action. Talking with many NGO leaders, both Serbian and Kosovar, we realised that also many bridges on the grassroot-level are disintegrating.

The communication about and preparations for the Special Grace and the Cosmic Blessing in Korea and several European locations took up most of our bandwidth. This meant working intensely as the FFWPU EUME - VP Team with the FFWPU EUME - BFD Team and communicating with the FFWPU Int'l IHQ

in Korea. I also conducted interviews and confessions in preparation for the blessing. It was moving to see how the struggle is real, but that at the same time God is working uniquely in everyone's life.

We also had a follow-up meeting to the HJ Staff Retreat that took place in January, to check whether we are still on track.

April: Korea and Blessing

Yoshiko went to Korea in the Vice President role, which meant I was rushing home from work each day to be with the kids and on occasion would bring our kids to work. My parents helped a lot during this time.

With the support of my kids and father, we could go to Stuttgart for the Cosmic Blessing event. Together with Michael and Nicole L., I oversaw the Blessing Ceremony there. This meant working with the German national leadership as well as members of the BFD and ESGD teams. The Stuttgart community made great efforts to make the celebration beautiful for the 9 couples and their families. Alex and Julika L. (Vice-Presidents West Region) and Gani and Marjeta R. (Vice-Presidents West) travelled to Tirana and supported a wonderful Cosmic Blessing event there. Congratulations to all the newly blessed couples!

This was also the first time I could put my new laser-cutting and 3-D printing skills to providential use, creating small presents for the Stuttgart couples.

May: Balkans and Switzerland

In May, we had a very successful IAYSP Youth Peace Conference in Pristina. It featured the S!NERGY competition which concluded the 8-month Peace Designer course that Ejona Icka and her team conducted at two Universities and one high school. The Peace Designer courses in cooperation with high schools and universities are our main tool to contribute to peace in the Balkans. After this pioneer phase we could secure third party funding to sustain and expand the project.

Kosovo Report (IAYSP)

As a family we went to visit my brother and his family in Switzerland, which was also great to meet the community of wonderful 2G Blessed Families, and talk, play and eat together.

June: Quiet Storm

This month was dedicated to preparation for the HJ Youth Pilgrimage and the 14-Day Divine Principle WS, as well as the closing of the school year, which is traditionally a very busy time there for me as a teacher. This year included the hand-over of all my teaching responsibilities as I would go on educational leave for one academic year.

Some longer standing disagreements in our FFWPU leadership boiled over into email exchanges. We did our best to respond to that situation. I realise, however, that my response was - although well intentioned, including some emergency Zoom calls together with our Vice-President Team and others - not good enough. Now, I understand that there were two reasons for my ineffective response: (a) personal limitations and (b) limitations in our FFWPU EUME work and mission culture.

Two concrete responses to limitations in our FFWPU work and mission culture are the following:

In November we sent a draft of the Education Policy out for a first round of feedback. Already many helpful comments and feedback came in.

A second round of consultations will take place in 2024. The point is to move towards principled decision making and action based on shared rules. One problem, I think, we need to tackle is that rather than directly talk with each other, we talk about each other, also in educational setting.

The second project is a Complaints and Grievance Policy, including a Mediation Team on EUME level. Conflicts and disagreements are an important part of life and improvement, however, in our communities too often people get hurt causing them to quit quietly or sometime loudly. In too few cases have we managed to deal with conflict constructively and make things better. This needs to change.

(If you are interested in these projects, please contact Bogdan at bogdan.pammer@ffwpu-eume.org)

June was also the month when our newly appointed International President visited the EUME region together with his staff team. We had our meeting in Camberg. President Song expressed that he wants the FFWPU IHQ to improve: better communication, more transparency and accountability, but also a profound spiritual revival of Spirit and Truth by uniting with True Mother, the Only Begotten Daughter,

who leads the providence on earth.

July and August: Spirit and Truth

In July our 7-year-old son Eleon and I participated in the Austrian Childrens Workshop for the first time, which was a wonderfully joyful experience.

A few days later the 14-Day Divine Principle Workshop started, also in Gafrenz, Austria. And after a few days at home, the 21-Day HJ Youth Pilgrimage took place. In July, our 40-Day DP reading condition for youth leaders also concluded. Over 30 people joined and 23 completed the full 40 days, sharing their personal reflections and realisations. It was an exciting time of profound learning.

I realised the Exposition of the Divine Principle is a Holy Scripture that makes clear that it itself is incomplete. At the same time, every time we read it again it gives us new life and deeper insights, infinitely. What stood out for me this time is how the Exposition of the Divine Principle explains (in several chapters repeatedly) that people, beliefs and institutions who were at the centre of God's work in one age become an obstacle for Him in the next, when pride and an overemphasis of one's own interpretation of the past blocks them from supporting God's work here and now.

The HJ Youth Pilgrimage was the first time for the Vice-President Team (esp., Matthew H., Michael and Nicole L., Sarah A., Gani R. and myself) to work together so closely and also intensely with VP Insoung Kwon as well as Inpyo Moon and the CB EUME Branch Team. It was tough and great at the same time and my appreciation for my two elder Korean brothers and the CB EUME branch team grew immensely in the process. We promised each other to start preparations for next year's HJ Youth Pilgrimage earlier and they are already underway.

It was very meaningful that the Pilgrimage was the first occasion since the war started where Ukrainian and Russian brothers and sisters (both young 1G and 2G) prayed, studied, worked and bonded together.

One thing I realized is that there is a difference between prayer and prayer. During the daily vigil prayers at the CheonShim Won, I experienced True Father in several incidents, feeling that his spiritual body was on fire. I repented, realising that we can only make the big changes in this world if we inherit that burning fire, allowing Father to manifest this burning energy on earth as we work alongside him and Mother, helping them to realise the promise they made to Heavenly Parent - Building God's Kingdom on earth in their lifetime.

September: Youth and Students for Peace

This September for the first time in seven years, I did not start a school year with new and old kids. Instead, we started home-schooling our eldest son and Yoshiko began to explore new projects and educational opportunities to develop herself.

We also had the IAYSP Assembly in Vienna, Austria, which allowed us to explore new creative way of developing IAYSP chapters in our region and improving our work. New staff members, graduates of our Peace Designer courses in the Balkans participated for the first time and we could make significant social outreach (Report IAYSP Assembly).

The following week, I went to Beirut, Lebanon. The local team, under the leadership of Sarah A. founded IAYSP Lebanon in Beirut's UNSECO Palace. It was wonderful and moving to see old and new members working together for the sake of the country. Although I was only there for a short time, I could experience how living in poverty and a "failed state" exhausts not only the body, but also the mind. Through physical challenges and limitations, God gave me a new perspective on poverty and life without or with only limited infrastructure.

Writing this my heart cries out to the people of Gaza West Bank, and Israel, I cannot begin to imagine what our brothers and sisters there are going through. It is agonizing that we as a movement have not done enough by any stretch of imagination to support and heal the region of Israel and Palestine.

I am grateful to Dr. Balcomb for pushing our relief efforts in Turkey, Syria, Marocco and Libya.

October and November: Hyo Jeong Youth Academy and BFD

October and November brought a personal low, mental and physical exhaustion. It was a time for introspection. Some effort was put into developing the projects mentioned in the June section above. With Orlande Schenk stepping down from her role as BFD director, it was also time to thank her for much investment over 5 years, apologize for not being available enough to support the BFD and not communicating effectively about critical issues.

Bogdan participated in the HARP and Young Adult Leaders Retreat (Glanow), lectured a 3-Day Divine Principle content at the EMPOWER Kick-Off WS (Gafrenz, Austria) and supported the Foundations In-person Retreat (Prague, Czech Republic). As a family we went to and supported the Matching and Blessing Preparation Workshop (Glanow, Poland) and could have a first in-person meeting with the BFD team and Marea T. as its new director.

We started monthly family Sunday service for local young blessed families in our city, Steyr, which has been joyful and enriching to share and support one another in our spiritual lives.

My 35th birthday turned out to be 5 days of being sick in bed, but I could experience it as a valuable time closing my 5th 7-year course and entering a new stage on a personal level that leading up to age 42.

December: CheonBo and welcoming Pres Matsuda

In December, our family went to the CheonBo event in Glanow and supported there. It was moving to see the hard-working CB team again. It was great to experience the spirit of CheonShim Won here in Europe. We also had our first planning meeting for next year's Pilgrimage, compiled the HJYA's annual report and planned the HJYA's staff retreat in February and had the last meeting of the third season of the Foundations program, competently organised and led by Victoire and Yaviel B. and their team. Also preparation of this year's annual review process (see document here) were made.

The other big thing in December was to welcome Dr. Koji M., President of IAYSP International for his tour of 7 nations, where he visited all the hard-working UPA missionaries and local members working with them. The tour took him to Romania, Hungary, Czech Republic, Croatia, Sweden, UK and Albania. I could join him in Romania, Hungary and Sweden. It was a very good experience to have a leader from IHQ listening to the stories and reports of local members, asking detailed questions to deeply understand the situation "in the mission field", discussing best practices and improvement as well as going out to witness on the street and joining local events with guests and witnessing contacts.

One topic for 2024 will be to strengthen the strategical and practical support to help communities develop their work to find and raise new members (based on the good foundation that Martine M. laid as leader of the Witnessing Department. She stepped down this year and is now focusing on coordinating the missionaries sent to our region).

After some initial reservations, I came to recognise CARP as a great vehicle for outreach to young people in our region. What caused that change? A spiritual experience urged me to invest much more in witnessing. Also, through many conversations on the topic over the year I could gain a better understanding how (i) the identity and profile of CARP in our region could be sharpened and (ii) how the relationship of CARP to both FFWPU and IAYSP can be clarified on national levels. Something to look forward to in 2024.

The last event we participated was the Family Workshop in Switzerland. It accommodated educational and (other) fun activities for all age groups and generation, exemplifying the power and joy when love, life and lineage come together. We hope that more communities can develop formats like this for our membership, but also for the many especially young families that seek loving, value-based and spiritually rooted communities that can enrich their lives.

Thank you

We deeply thank all of you for your great investment in 2024, for working together, taking on new responsibilities, giving critical feedback.

Let's do our utmost to help our True Parents succeed in their historic mission by uniting with True Mother here and now. Let's also make sure that our families and communities grow to become happy, healthy and holy.

Bogdan and Yoshiko