

## The Lost Lambs: One Mother's Reflection on the Alienation of Unification Youth

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November 26, 2019



"What do you think? If a man has a hundred sheep and one of them goes astray, will he not leave the ninety-nine on the slopes and go in search of the one that has wandered off?"

-- Matthew 18:12

The Unification Movement has no shortage of programs for youth. In addition to Sun Moon University in Korea, there is CARP (Collegiate Association for the Research of Principles), GPA (Generation Peace Academy), the Youth Federation for World Peace, the Crane's Club, and many other youth-centered organizations.

When I see groups such as CARP or GPA at public events, they are truly an inspiration and are some of the loveliest fruits of the decades-long global investment of True Parents.

Yet there is a part of me that always hurts at the same time, a part that asks, "What about the *other* children?" I mean, the ones who were raised in the movement but became estranged.



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I can think of so many families where all three, four or more siblings became completely disengaged from the church after high school. (*Note: This is not a data-driven study based on scientific research. It is simply one mother's personal experience and observations*)

What are the possible causes of such alienation? How do we address it and stop the hemorrhage? Finally, who will go after the lost lambs of the Unification Movement and bring them back, like the good shepherd of the Gospels?

Here are some of the issues I see in our movement which appear to be contributing to the alienation of our young, followed by my suggestions for their remedy.

### Church culture and conservative vs. progressive politics

Right-wing politics is a huge turn-off for many young people. The modern "millennial" generation (people born, roughly, between 1981 and 1996) are often progressive in their thinking, concerned about social injustice, economic inequality, gender issues, and the environment, whereas older generation members who joined during the Cold War-era saw the world differently and likely were raised on a spiritual diet of CAUSA and Victory Over Communism.

*Solution:*

Older members need to temper their political views when at home in the presence of their children, or when attending church. If politics must be discussed, it should be strictly respectful, bipartisan, collaborative, and consensus-building. Fortunately we can get an abundance of inspiration for such balanced discussion from the head-wing teachings of our founders.

### Listening to them

We first generation members do a lot of teaching and preaching to our kids. From early childhood until they leave (or perhaps flee) the nest, we subject them to Sunday School, home school, church service, summer camp, and probably daily *Hoon Dok Hae* spiritual readings. These things are our parental responsibility. But there is a need for us also to *listen* to our children both at home and at church. In the old song, "Teach Your Children" by Crosby, Stills, Nash and Young, one verse is all about children teaching their parents:

"And you, of tender years,  
Can't know the fears  
That your elders grew by.  
And so please help them with your youth.  
They seek the truth

Before they can die."

As one blogger put it so well, "Millennials value voice and receptivity above all else. When a church forges ahead without ever asking for our input, we get the message loud and clear."

### **Caring about what they think**

Millennials often ask: "Why then, should we blindly serve an institution that we cannot change or shape?"

*Solution:*

Wisdom can come "from the mouths of babes," but it will be lost if there is no receptive ear. We need to create regular opportunities for inter-generational conversation (forums, surveys, meetings) where we *listen* to the hopes, fears, dreams, needs, opinions, and dilemmas of youth and young adults with respect and love. We can also invite millennials to serve on church councils or leadership teams where they can actually make a difference.

### **Some may feel traumatized by fear and shame-based purity education**

Purity education for girls and boys in the Unification Movement has been based on an evangelical model which, in recent years, has been found to have fallen short. The Internet has an abundance of high-quality search results on the topic.

Programs such as True Love Waits teach children to associate sexuality with shame and depravity. For example, a girl who loses her virginity is compared to a variety of spoiled things: a flower whose petals have all fallen off, a crushed soda can, a chipped cup, a soiled napkin, a cup of water tainted with spit. Many children subjected to this model of education arrive in adulthood suffering from depression, anxiety, fear of relationships, and an inability to achieve sexual satisfaction.

*Solution:*

We need to re-think and re-visit how we educate our youngsters in this highly sensitive area. I propose that, rather than being taught by well-meaning youth leaders not much older than their audience, purity education should be taught only by trained specialists, with parents present. Content should include Chapter One (the Principle of Creation) education on the divine beauty and joy of original sexuality rather than excessive emphasis on Chapter Two (the Fall of Man). In the case of sexual mistakes that might unfortunately happen in the future or may have already happened, educators should emphasize the grace, forgiveness and unconditional love of our Heavenly Parent, or as the song goes, "the overwhelming, never-ending, reckless love of God."

### **A discrepancy between our words and our actions?**

Modern youth seem to have a highly sensitive radar when it comes to double standards and hypocrisy. If we are talking about building an ideal world but not actually doing anything to contribute to that vision, our children will be quick to spot the contradiction. If we are teaching about ideal marriage while obviously having marital problems, the incongruity will be painfully obvious. Such inconsistencies damage and erode the immature faith of youngsters.

*Solution:*

We have to practice whatever we're preaching to our kids. At the family level, by getting off our couches and into Home Church and tribal messiahship activities, we can live out the principle of living for the sake of others. At the church level, at least half of our programs should be concerned with outreach rather than in-reach. Outreach programs could include interfaith and interdenominational activities as well as social justice projects to alleviate poverty, hunger, interracial tensions, and other social ills in our local communities. They could include service projects to care for the environment such as tree-planting, community gardens or collecting trash in a run-down neighborhood.

We can learn a lot from our Christian friends. For example, some Christian churches have graffiti removal ministries; some offer tattoo removals. Others adopt babies born to imprisoned or drug-addicted mothers. I'm not suggesting we copy these specific programs, but rather we try sincerely to identify issues that plague our specific communities, then use our imagination, creativity and available resources to address those issues.

With regard to marital problems of blessed couples, it is imperative we seek help, whether from outside the movement or within it. We cannot effectively promote marriage and the family ideal to our children (or anyone else) unless we're "walking the walk." Whether it involves individual counseling, couples therapy, group programs such as The Marriage Course, blessed couples absolutely must work on their

marriages. Considering the huge array of resources now readily available and affordable, we have no excuse.



### **Too few young leaders**

As True Mother has emphasized time and again, our national and worldwide leadership must increasingly be led by second, and even third generation, Unificationists. Yet, new, younger leaders will not emerge where there is no real democratic process for them to partake in. If church governance is characterized by entrenched elders, the next generation is unlikely to aspire to leadership, no matter how gifted or prepared they may be. If it seems they would have to wait for a current leader to *die* before an opening becomes available, they are more likely to drop out of the movement and seek other avenues where they can utilize their talents.

#### *Solution:*

Allow the winds of change and the wisdom of the Holy Spirit to freshen our old ideas and stagnant organizations. Remove ineffective leaders through democratic processes and let God fill the vacuum.

### **Going after the lost lambs**

Despite the obviously steep drop-off of millennials from church, our Unification Movement seems not to publicly acknowledge it or react with a sufficient level of concern. If the focus is all on the "good children" who *do* show up and get involved, it's easy to consider the absent ones as an anomaly. Or, to dismiss them with some superficial explanation, like "Oh, they live too far away," or "They're just busy with work/school/family," or "They joined the \_\_\_ group" (fill in the blank), without ever following up and actually *speaking* to the persons in question to find out why they really stopped coming. The answers could be illuminating.

If we continue to do little and largely ignore the gravity of this problem, we may be fairly accused of being "complacent, irrelevant and approaching extinction."

#### *Solution:*

One thing that could be immediately implemented is the exit interview. This is a practice used by business organizations for the purpose of improving the organization. In the exit interview, a terminating employee meets with a human resources staff member. Through the frank and honest feedback of the departing employee, the organization often receives helpful information pertaining to workplace culture, management solutions and employee morale. Done effectively and consistently, such interviews contribute to fostering a more welcoming work environment and more positive workplace relationships. This concept could easily be adapted and adopted for our church organizations.

Second, we desperately need to train and hire youth pastors who have the desire and skillset to work with millennials, so we can keep the young members we still have. We also need to train and hire the kind of pastors who have the heart to reach out and witness to the alienated. Where are the ones with the heart of the missionary, such as exemplified by the memorable words of Charles Thomas Studd?

Some want to live within the sound  
Of church or chapel bell;  
I want to run a rescue shop,  
Within a yard of hell.

Our children are wonderful and exemplary. But too many struggle in some kind of earthly hell. We must find and call upon those good shepherds with the guts, gumption and love that is required to climb through the thorns and thickets of hell, and commission them to go after and witness to the lost lambs of the Unification Movement and bring them back.

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Photo at top: *A lamb in Auckland, New Zealand, courtesy of Bill Fairs on [Unsplash](#).*