

Penn Students and Staff Decry False Portrait of Lovin' Life in Student Newspaper

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First- and second-generation Unificationists continue to protest an article in the *Daily Pennsylvanian*, University of Pennsylvania's (Penn) independent newspaper, which was published on April 5, 2012 and titled "Some Religious Organizations near Campus Show 'Darker Side.'"



Megan Dickson, current undergraduate at the University of Pennsylvania

Second-generation Unificationist Megan Dickson, currently an undergraduate at Penn pursuing a degree in International Relations, wrote to the *UC Newsletter*, "I am tremendously grateful to the Unificationist community in which I grew up. Thus I'm naturally disappointed in and offended by the recent article posted by my own university newspaper. Far from 'high-pressure tactics' to 'keep members,' I have been encouraged by both my family and my community to seek God out, irrespective of religious tradition; over the years I have participated in Buddhist retreats and meditation sessions, Native-American powwows and sage-brush ceremonies, Shabbat dinners, Christian conferences and small groups, the school Gospel choir and numerous inter-faith meetings and discussions, to name a few.

"Furthermore, I have never once been obligated in any way to 'sign over [my] autonomy to the group.' Rather, from summer camps to services to social events, I have been able to develop as a leader and gained many of the skill sets that allowed me to succeed not only in my personal and family life, but academically and professionally as well. I wholeheartedly agree that any faith tradition should bring out the best in people, which is why I continue to practice the principles of service, respect and love for others that I first learned within the Unification community. The article does a disservice to Penn's society of faith and all religious groups as a whole. I encourage the authors to do their research before insulting and misrepresenting another positive group."



Unificationists Marion Warin Miller and son Roderick Miller, who is currently a second-year at Harvard Law School, are both alumni of Penn.

Second-generation Unificationist Roderick Miller said, "I graduated *summa cum laude* from the University of Pennsylvania's undergraduate program in 2010 and am now in my second year at Harvard Law School. As a proud Unificationist, I was both saddened and dismayed by the sentiments expressed in the article recently published by the *Daily Pennsylvanian*.

"The Unificationist chapter near Penn's campus is a vibrant and supportive church community, and was a source of strength and support for me during my years at Penn. As an organization, the Unification Church is tolerant and respectful of all religious faiths, and to characterize it as a 'high-pressure' organization is way off the mark. Particularly disturbing to me was the author's casual usage of the offensive term 'Moonie,' as well as the approving reference to 'de-programming,' a horrific practice that has historically involved kidnapping individuals and forcing them to renounce their religious faith, often by means of physical or psychological torture.

"We live in a nation founded upon the precepts of tolerance and religious liberty. Religious bigotry in any

guise should be unacceptable, and the *Daily Pennsylvanian's* article falls well short of the journalistic standards one would expect from an Ivy League student newspaper.”

Miller’s mother, Marion Warin Miller, a Unification-Church member since 1974 and also an alumna of Penn, wrote the following:

“I am both a proud Unification Church member and a proud graduate of Penn in the Faculty of Arts and Sciences in '76. I was deeply hurt and saddened by the recent article in the *Daily Pennsylvanian* denigrating minority religions, including Lovin’ Life Ministries of the Unification Church of Philadelphia. As CARP (the Collegiate Association for the Research of Principles) president on campus when I was a Ph.D. student, I spoke up about our rights and won our case at a Committee on Open Expression hearing organized about us. Benjamin Franklin, the founder of our school, is a role model for tolerance, a model we need to continue to emulate. He was a staunch advocate for religious tolerance and a free press, he firmly believed in journalistic ethics and the right of human beings to control their own lives and he had an unshakeable faith in the wisdom of common people – we should seek to honor and maintain his legacy of fairness, civility, respect and open expression.

“Respectful and careful study and appreciation of others' experiences, in an unbiased, anthropological fashion, is the proper way to approach others in our richly multicultural society, the most open in the whole world. As a French person, I am proud that France was intimately involved in this great country from the start, and I suffer when I witness intolerance and bigotry of any kind, be it against Muslims, Mormons or any group. The Unification Church, at 123 S. 41st Street in Philadelphia, the City of Brotherly Love, has been a great source of comfort for many, including our family, as well as a place of regular ecumenical dialog and cooperation and good works in the city for many years. We are more than happy to speak to classes and professors any time we can help. We are proud to be an influence for good in West Philadelphia.



The Daily Pennsylvanian is Penn's independent student news organization and covers news and sports from Penn and from around the Philadelphia metro area.

“Lovin’ Life Ministries, created by Rev. In Jin Moon, daughter of Rev. Sun Myung Moon three years ago on Easter Sunday, has greatly inspired my four children and countless others to build on their parents' good works and efforts for world peace and reconciliation. I am proud that my children have attended or are attending college or graduate school at Princeton, the University of Pennsylvania, Harvard, Johns Hopkins and Case Western Reserve, while, at the same time, building God-centered families and communities.

“When I joined the Unification Church, I was desperately seeking to help solve this world's problems, studying Economic Development, as well as Marxism, and I was so grateful for the comprehensive vision and teaching of the Unification Church, which explained the Bible in depth and the historical providence of restoration and the suffering heart of our loving Heavenly Parent. Many young people were inspired by Rev. Moon's thorough presentations – he was an electrical engineer as well as a loving pastor, and he satisfied our longing to understand God's Providence intellectually, as well as with our hearts.

“I look forward to helping establish a better dialog with the University that I love, and I hope to play a role in dissipating the misunderstandings and hurts which unfairly cause pain to excellent people, as I well know from personal experience. We should remember that Pennsylvania itself was founded by William Penn as a haven of religious freedom and tolerance. (See William Penn's ‘The Quaker Ideal of Religious Tolerance’ at: www.digitalhistory.uh.edu/documents/documents_p2.cfm?doc=221)

The scurrilous attack on minority religions in the *Daily Pennsylvanian* is anathema to the founding principles of the University of Pennsylvania, of Philadelphia and of Pennsylvania itself, and I feel deeply that this is a teaching moment, and an opportunity for greater good.”



Dr. James Park, a graduate of Penn's Wharton Business School in '84

Dr. James Park, who attended Penn together with Mrs. Miller, also expressed disappointment in the *Daily Pennsylvanian's* misrepresentation of the Unification Church. "I graduated in '84 from Penn's Wharton Business School," he said. "I was the Chairman of the Student Activities Council (SAC), Chairman of the United Minorities Council, the co-founder and co-publisher of *The Red and The Blue*, a conservative newspaper on campus, and before that I was the president of the Korean Students Association. I went on to earn my law degree from Columbia and Harvard Law Schools and a Ph.D. from Columbia Business School in Statistical Finance.

"During my time at Penn, the whole campus knew I was an active member of the Unification Church, and to this day I am proud of my identity as a second-generation Unificationist. I'm appalled and disappointed that my *alma mater* would misrepresent Lovin' Life Ministries and the Unification Church so outrageously. I would expect that such a University, its professors and students would exercise humanity, intelligence and perspicacity when dealing with other organizations – yet this article seems to imply otherwise."



Dan Fefferman, the president of the International Coalition of Religious Freedom

Dan Fefferman, president of the International Coalition of Religious Freedom (ICRF) and a 40-year member of the Unification Church, posted the following comment on the webpage of the article: "The article quotes University of Pennsylvania Professor of Religious Studies Stephen Dunning as recommending that members of 'these groups' undergo 'deprogramming.' I hope the writer got this quote wrong, because such a recommendation from a Penn professor would be even more irresponsible than an egregiously misleading paraphrase of what a professor actually said. I hope Dr. Dunning will clarify, since I'm sure he knows that in academic literature, 'deprogramming' means abduction and forced confinement to break a person's faith, while what he apparently meant to speak of was something like 'exit counseling,' which is voluntary. Beyond that, I must say that this article was generally inflammatory and tends to encourage negative stereotypes against the members of the groups it describes. For more on deprogramming, please see ICRF's website at www.religiousfreedom.com.

Nari Miller, Mrs. Miller's daughter-in-law, who will graduate with a Masters in Liberal Arts and a certificate in Film Studies from Penn this coming May and who also works full time in the history department at Penn, posted the following comment in response to the *Daily Pennsylvanian's* article:

"I confess I am a little confused about this article and the mention of Lovin' Life Ministries. Shrum writes, quoting Dunning, that the group performs 'a lot of good works but sometimes show a darker side.' My question is, how exactly does the group 'show a darker side?' Dunning does not elaborate, nor does Shrum illustrate that in the article. Elsewhere in the article, DeGoede explains that her group's mission is to 'to inherit the true love of God by bringing people into a real relationship with God and others,' and that the group makes attempts to expand their ministry. This doesn't seem all that 'dark' to me. In this case, Shrum's words, and Dunning's quotes, are baseless accusations that fly in the face of elementary journalistic ethics.

"The last time I checked, the University of Pennsylvania was welcome to all groups and, to quote, 'does not discriminate on the basis of race, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, religion, color, national or ethnic origin, age...' etc. Shrum's attacks on Lovin' Life Ministries, his decision to lump them with others groups that are clearly not on the same level, and his use of the name 'Moonie' – a derogatory term – are not only in very poor form, but they demonstrate a flagrant disregard for Penn's non-discrimination

statement as well. As a member of the Penn community, I am deeply disappointed that the *Daily Pennsylvanian* decided to run such a biased and unfounded article that undermines the mission of the University and alienates Penn students (as mentioned by DeGoede) who've chosen to follow Lovin' Life Ministries."



Igraine Convery, undergrad at Penn State University

Unificationist students from other campuses in Pennsylvania expressed their indignation as well. Igraine Convery, an undergraduate student at Penn State University studying Developmental Psychology said, "I am a proud member of the Unification Church, 23 years old, who was born into this movement. I had the choice of leaving or choosing a different path but I didn't. At one point I almost did, but am so glad I stayed. Without this movement, my parents would have never found each other and I would have never existed. This is not only a movement or a church or a religion or, as some call it, a 'cult.' It is a way of life. I would have never met my best friends or the love of my life if it weren't for the Unification Church. Everyone is entitled to his or her opinion of it, but don't form one before you get your facts straight and actually experience it for yourself."



Penn was founded by Benjamin Franklin, who was, according to Mrs. Miller, a "staunch advocate for religious tolerance and a free press."

"My life has been enriched by the insight I've gained from Unification Thought and the Unification Church community with which I was raised," said Sunkwon Bush, an undergraduate student at Drexel University in Philadelphia. "I have many close friends in Pennsylvania, New York, New Jersey and Maryland whom I've met thanks to our shared faith."

"Frankly speaking, this article grossly misrepresents our movement. One of the tenets of the church I admire most is that it emphasizes the importance of interfaith- and intercultural cooperation and reconciliation. People are different and everyone has his or her own unique perspective and life path. Plenty of my friends and family have experimented with other faiths or no faith at all, and many members still practice the faiths with which they were raised. My parents have always been accepting of my own choices in ideology and belief. Does that really sound like 'high-pressure tactics' or signing over 'autonomy to a group?'"

"I was shocked at how casually Stephen Dunning mentions 'some form of psychological de-programming.' I have to wonder if the author ever took the time to consider what is usually involved in this process: kidnapping, isolation, coercion, sometimes even physical torture. In short, a complete and utter violation of human rights and religious freedom. Parents of some of my friends were kidnapped and subjected to this sort of treatment when the church first started growing in the United States. Can you imagine what it's like to be kidnapped at the behest of your family by men and women who make a living by forcibly coercing you into leaving your faith? These 'deprogrammers' are people who took advantage of people's fear and misunderstanding and convinced them to allow their children to be kidnapped, detained and tortured for their religious beliefs. Is that the sort of practice that an author of a newspaper for an Ivy League school should be advocating?"

Media teams in New York and Philadelphia are currently seeking the audience of Stephen Dunning and the faculty advisor of the *Daily Pennsylvanian* to discuss the issue at hand.