

Unificationists Respond Quickly to Skewed Story in Las Vegas Sun

Doug Burton
September 2, 2011

Unificationists and pro-family advocates were dismayed when on August 30, 2011, the *Las Vegas Sun* published an article titled "Unification Church 'means business' with Las Vegas Facility" referencing the recent dedication ceremony for the Won Mo boat. In response to the *Sun's* story, published without comment from Unification Church sources and with insulting language, the Unification Church USA's Public Affairs representative, Douglas Burton, sent a formal letter of complaint to the *Sun* the same day and requested a letter from the editor of the *Las Vegas Sun*. The church set up a new media relations office in Las Vegas on Wednesday, Aug. 31, 2011, and on Thursday, the Nevada State Pastor, Rev. Staffan Berg, his assistant, Mr. Demian Dunkley, and Burton made courtesy calls at the *Las Vegas Sun* and the sister paper, the *Las Vegas Review-Journal*. The good news is that the *Sun* story sparked invitations from some Las Vegas broadcast media to the church leaders to talk about their goals on public-affairs programs.

There's always a silver lining.



Converted by Rev. Moon into the Unification Church's Peace Palace, this warehouse hosts church-related events such as the Won Mo Boat ceremony.

By Joe Schoenmann

Tuesday, Aug. 30, 2011 | 2 a.m.

When Clark County Commissioner Steve Sisolak took part in a ribbon-cutting ceremony at a massive warehouse near McCarran International Airport a few weeks ago, he thought he was dedicating a new boat-manufacturing company's facilities.

"They are creating 50 new jobs. They've developed this new craft that won't sink if there's an accident because the hull is filled with helium," said Sisolak, who was joined by representatives from the governor's office at the new Won Mo Boats facility.

But the building will also be home to something "far bigger and more significant" than a boat-manufacturing plant, according to the owners, the Unification Church, whose members are known as Moonies. The 135,000-square-foot warehouse will contain a marble-inlaid "Peace Palace," a "state-of-the-art training facility for education and worship."

The recent grand opening “was a public statement to the city’s establishment: the Unification Church has arrived in Las Vegas and it means business,” according to the website www.familyfed.org/news/index.php?id=292&page=1&apage=1.

Why Las Vegas? The website says the leader of the Unification Church, the Rev. Sun Myung Moon, and his wife moved to the area three years ago after he “received revelations in recent years, while in Hawaii, that Las Vegas would be the hub of a new cultural and economic revival in America.”

The church’s U.S. president, the Rev. In Jin Moon, said her parents “are turning Las Vegas from a city of sinning to a city of giving.”

Calls placed to the church’s offices in New York and a project manager for the Peace Palace were not returned.

Sisolak said officials at the opening had no idea about the group’s grand religious designs for the facility, but it wouldn’t have mattered.

“I believe in freedom of religion,” he said. “I wasn’t there to promote a religion, I was there because they are bringing jobs.”

The Unification Church was founded by Moon in South Korea in the early 1950s. The church believes that Moon is the second coming of Jesus Christ and that they are creating heaven on earth. As it grew, the church became more involved in commercial and cultural endeavors, such as its ownership of the Washington Times.

But the church, which is perhaps best known for its mass weddings, has many critics who call it a cult and claim that it brainwashes followers.

Steve Hassan, a former Unification Church member-turned critic and director of the Freedom of Mind Center in Cambridge, Mass., said he was unaware of the church’s plans for Las Vegas. But he said the church has sought to become more mainstream over the decades.

“They are bigger than ever and more powerful than ever,” said Hassan, who says he was a church leader in the 1970s.

Hassan said the church practices “covert hypnosis” and uses techniques such as sleep deprivation and social psychology to control members, “to make you less able to think analytically.” The bad economy, in combination with the other stresses in people’s lives, have created, in Hassan’s view, “the perfect storm” for recruitment.

Other recent events suggest the church is attempting to raise its profile here. About a week before the ribbon-cutting, the church donated \$50,000 to the local chapter of the Salvation Army, \$10,000 to Galilee Camps — which has a summer camp for children on Lake Tahoe — and \$10,000 to Safe Faith United, a women’s advocacy group.

As for the boat-facility opening, it isn’t the first time elected officials have participated in a Unification Church event without fully understanding its significance to the group.

In 2004, Moon was crowned “King of Peace” at a ceremony organized by the church and held in the Dirksen Senate Office Building in Washington. The crowning ritual — Moon and his wife wore tall gold crowns and robes — began “the era of the Eternal Peace Kingdom, one global family under God.”

About a dozen members of Congress were in attendance, according to media reports. Asked about it afterward, many of the lawmakers claimed they had been misled. Their understanding was it was to be a celebration of world peace.

Doug's Response

To: Mr. Joe Schoenmann
Las Vegas Sun
From: Doug Burton
Re: "Moonie"
Date: Aug. 30, 2011

Dear Mr. Schoenmann,

Your article in today's *Las Vegas Sun*, "Unification Church 'Means Business' with Las Vegas Facility," contained some inaccuracies and regrettably smeared the Unification Church with the "Moonie" word. The charitable donations to the Salvation Army and the Galilee Camps were awarded on May 22, 2011, not a week ago.

Also, are you aware of the fact that the word, "Moonie" is a pejorative and never used by the Associated Press in more than 20 years? *The New York Times* refuses to use the "M word" even in quoted remarks. That is the gold standard of fairness. "Moonie" is a slur, and its use here perpetuates the harmful stereotype of Unificationists as mindless loyalists incapable of independent thought. The proper term to use, of course, is "Unificationist."

It also is regrettable that you quoted at length Mr. Steve Hassan, a man who was a member of the Unification Church only for a couple of years, yet who has made a long career of deriding members of new religious movements and doing all in his power to deny them their religious freedom. He is well known for his hateful language.

The Unification Church has been a part of Las Vegas for more than 40 years. Some of its most respected members have stayed active in the church all of this time, as have their children. The testimonies of some Las Vegas natives who joined the Unification Church before 1970 are published in a new book, *Tribute*. Unificationists are in Las Vegas to make the city bloom, culturally and economically. Please allow Las Vegas citizens who are members of the church to have their voice in the *Las Vegas Sun*.

We would appreciate a letter from the editor regarding your policy on the "Moonie" word.

Respectfully,

Doug Burton
Public Affairs
Unification Church in the USA