

## Unification is Goal for Street Preacher John Harries [Cromwell]

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Downtown shoppers and office workers on lunch breaks no doubt have been wondering about a tall, blond man who for the past two weeks has been trying to shout above the traffic noise at the corner of Robinson and Park Ave.

Looks of curiosity, amusement, and sometimes disgust, register on their faces as they hurriedly cross the street. Some perhaps are rushing to avoid what they feel would be an uncomfortable confrontation with the "street preacher."

"I've grown accustomed to rejection, said the street preacher, 24-year-old John Harries. "You have people swear at you and push you aside. In New York, it was rougher than it is here."

Harries, who possesses the charm and accent of his native England, came to Oklahoma City three weeks ago to organize a local center or community of the Unification Church.

In his street preaching, Harries encourages people to listen to him, ask questions and come to lectures in the local center, currently housed in his apartment at 1207 NW 26.

Harries said he hopes to set up a thriving church in Oklahoma City but frankly admitted the "Bible Belt" is not fertile ground for new religious thinking. The response so far has been "very poor," he said.

"Sometimes they will just say 'beat it.' Some will stop and listen politely," said Harries, who spends a couple of hours a day preaching on the corner.

The Unification Church, founded in the 1950's by Sun Myung Moon, a South Korean, seeks to break down the "schismatic barriers" in Christianity's 300 denominations and barriers in all world religions, Harries explained.

He said members believe their teaching, the "Divine Principle," revealed to Moon over a period of several years, is "a clear message from God for man at this time."

Each missionary is responsible for his own support, Harries said. "Our organization is small and new, so we don't have an institution to supply money, or any wealthy donors."

Eighty young people in the United States currently are carrying out the mission work, he said.

Harries has no car and said bus transportation in Oklahoma City is too costly so he depends on hitchhiking.

He said several people have given him food, and on two occasions he sold his blood plasma to a commercial blood bank. This netted him \$5 each time, he said.

"I can live on a budget of about 50 cents or 75 cents a day for food," Harries said.

Breakfast each day is a bowl of oatmeal and powdered milk. Lunch most often is a peanut butter and jelly sandwich and water. "That's free," Harries joked. For dinner, he heats a can of soup.

Educated in electronics, Harries left a well-paying job as service manager for an electronics firm to work in the Unification Church. His mission fields have included New Haven Conn. and Washington, D.C.

Youngest of six children, Harries and his parents nine years ago emigrated from England.

He spent most of his life living on a non-denominational communal farm in Shropshire, an experience Harries described as "the most idealistic form of Christianity I have ever encountered."

The 230-member community supported itself by manufacturing agricultural tools, Harries said.

He spent the last three years of his life in England living in a 200-room mansion, Bulstrode, set on 70 acres of ornamental gardens near London, Harries said.

The religious community had moved from its former location, he explained.

The mansion, formerly owned by an English nobleman, provided a life "almost like a monastery," Harries said. Living in a religious community made him always think of himself as a group, he said.

Harries said many of the Unification Church followers live in communities, but this is not required. Self-imposed moral standards include no smoking or drinking in the centers, he said.

Harries said the Unification Church's purpose "really is to serve other churches," providing a way for reformation and restoration."

He said he believes "There is one God, so each man can develop a relationship with that God if he can understand God's principles, the way God works."

"No religion should exist as an institution."