

Austria as a Providential Nation

Peter Zoehrer
December 4, 2014



Mrs. Lan Young Moon (seated, center) and her husband No Hi Pak (far right) at a WFWP event ends in Vienna

On December 4, True Parents designated Austria a "providential nation." Providential nations are selected from among advanced nations and nations that have played a significant role in True Parents' providence. Our Austrian members have testified that this designation is humbling and they are now reflecting on how they can meet the great expectations that our Heavenly Parent and True Parents have for providential nations. They feel they have the heart and the determination to work toward Vision 2020 and to prepare a conducive environment in their nation to declare God's word.

Here is some background to the history and present day situation of the Austrian church, which is looking to the future with hope.

A global outlook

Rev. Paul Werner came to Austria to start his mission as the first pioneer of the Unification Church on May 18, 1965. Already in 1969, there were fifty members in the country. In March 1969, Father switched the national leaders of Austria and Germany; this sent Rev. Werner to Germany and brought Rev. Peter Koch, who would be instrumental in pioneering Eastern Europe, to Austria.

European outreach

Within three years of founding of the church here, Austria became an "export nation." In 1968, Austrian missionaries went to Switzerland, and to Czechoslovakia, which was a nation at that time. The following year, Austrian members began outreach work in Turkey, Belgium, Denmark and Luxemburg.

During the 1970s, the movement went through severe persecution spearheaded by the established churches, the government and the media. This led to dissolution (official banning) of the Unification Church in 1974. Ours became an underground church. This however did not deter Rev. Koch and other members from witnessing throughout the country.

They established numerous pioneer centers, and organized Divine Principle workshops. Many people joined throughout the 1970s. We have a thriving church of several hundred members despite Austria having a population of less than 9 million.

Mission Butterfly

At the beginning of the 1980s, Rev. Koch felt inspired by God to send missionaries to the communist countries of the Soviet Empire. That is, to seek to save those trapped behind the "Iron Curtain." ("Iron curtain" is a term long used to refer to any impenetrable barrier. Winston Churchill -- two-time prime minister of the United Kingdom -- used it in 1946 to describe countries under communist control that had

suddenly closed their borders and cut off relations with the rest of the world soon after World War II.) Rev. Koch secretly selected more than twenty of the most brilliant young members and prepared them for Mission Butterfly, which was the code word used for this underground missionary project. First, the missionaries had to "leave" the Unification Church. In the manner of spies, they had to take on the false identity of ex-members while still in Austria. Dr. Gunther Wurzer, a missionary to the Soviet Union called this "a lonely and painful period." In his words, taking on the persona of someone disillusioned with our church "caused immense distress to my immediate family and to many others. My sister, Inge, was shocked that I had apparently left the church and my younger brother, who had recently joined was confused and did not know what to believe." Having seemingly left their religious lives behind them, they crossed -- at the risk of their lives -- the "Iron Curtain" to their mission countries, Russia, Poland, Romania, East Germany, Yugoslavia, Hungary, Czechoslovakia and Bulgaria.

Post-Soviet activities

Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, True Parents met Soviet President Gorbachev in Moscow in April 1990. Father strongly requested the immediate implementation of religious freedom from the Russian president.

Right after the Moscow conference, True Parents came to Germany to a large meeting of European members including the former underground missionaries. Father launched a grand mobilization of hundreds of members from Western Europe to support our missionaries in Eastern Europe. Thousands of young members, fruits of the incredible pioneering work of our missionaries in the communist countries, awaited them.

Active and interactive

Austria's capital, Vienna, is home of one of the largest, most inspired and fastest-growing FFWPU communities in Europe. Each of six communities in the nation is making great effort to accomplish the tribal messiah mission in the context of Vision 2020.

Good unity exists between first- and second-generation members in Austria. An Austrian man in our second generation is leading European Youth UPF (besides being one of the top students at Vienna University). A second-generation woman is leading Youth WFWP in Vienna. Older second-generation members work as youth leaders and have dedicated themselves to preparing younger members as future leaders.

The Faculty of Comparative Religious Studies at Vienna University is engaged in a scientific research project on the history of the Austrian Unification Movement (1965–2014). Already they have published some articles in their scientific book Religions in Austria (English). The university is collecting conversion narratives of our members, here. So far, they have amassed more than seventy. They will eventually summarize these in a scientific journal.

On May 26, this year, Vienna University invited Mr. Peter Zoehrer, the Austrian national leader (and Cain-nation national messiah) to give a lecture on the topic "The Unification Movement -- A Profile." The hall was packed and the professors as well as the students appeared to like the presentation.

The university invited him to return in the coming year.

Some points of note

The Vienna-based NGO Forum for Religious Freedom Europe (FOREF Europe) took the fight for religious freedom in Japan to the United Nations Human Rights Council. Recently a significant victory occurred in the Tokyo High Court. For the first time Mr. Toru Goto, who suffered kidnapping followed by twelve years' confinement, won a landmark victory against those that had perpetrated these acts against him. (They have to pay millions of yen in compensation.) This is truly a turning point.

The app production team, Golden Garden Productions, founded by a few engaged blessed children from Austria, developed an app for smartphones and iPhones that features more than four hundred quotations from True Father's speeches. Sun Myung Moon Quotes can be downloaded free of charge from Google Play or Apple iTunes. The themes covered are God, Faith in Practice, Prayer, Life, True Love, Marriage, Family, Happiness, Success, Leadership and Motivation. The selected quotations convey simple and universal wisdom. Without prior knowledge of the Divine Principle or our theology, they are readily understandable.

The app thus serves as a smooth introduction to True Parents' values and ideals and provides inspiration. In nations on all continents, people have downloaded the app since its December 2012 release. In this way, Golden Garden Productions is contributing to the dissemination of God's word throughout the world.

Providential organizations

Vienna is a hub of various international organizations, including the United Nations and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE).



A performance on the United Nations International Day of Families

Two providential organizations (UPF and WFP) work permanently at the Vienna International Center, which is one of four UN offices around the globe (New York, United States; Geneva, Switzerland; Vienna, Austria; Nairobi, Kenya).

Given their consultative status, WFP staff members have authorization to enter the UN as they wish. They have been working at the UN Vienna for ten years. Hence, they have established an impressive network at the UN among various NGOs and other types of international organizations.

The women working at WFP Austria are very persistent and extremely dedicated in their work for reconciliation and world peace. UPF Austria has also been active at the UN locally since its founding. For twenty-five years, Mr. Peter Haider, Austria's UPF president, has been building a foundation in inter-religious and

intercultural relations. UPF Switzerland, UPF UK and UPF Austria have worked together throughout the last seven years or more to hold effective International Leadership Conferences (ILC) and European Leadership Conferences (ELC).

Following True Fathers instruction that UPF Europe should open the way to Russia (and even to China) one of the most outstanding ILC conferences was held at the UN Vienna on October 12, 2012. Europe and Russia -- Partners in a Globalized World, was the conference title. It attracted high-level speakers from Russia and Europe for discussions of complex issues effecting the Russia – Europe partnership. Those discussions continued in conferences in Paris and quite recently in Moldova.

Doors open to the future

Forty years after Interior Ministry officially dissolved the Austrian Unification Church, we submitted an official application for state recognition as a Registered Confessional Community.

In 2015, we will celebrate our fiftieth anniversary with this new status as a providential nation. We expect also to be an official Confessional Community recognized by the Federal Republic of Austria.