

European Unificationists Grapple with the Challenge of Winning the Rising Generation

Victor Lorentzen and Knut Holdhus.
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In July, 2011, second-generation from all over Europe from ages 12-18 met up for a summer camp, of which the motto was “This is my home, in harmony with God’s heart.”

As a 23-year-old European who grew up in the Unification Church in Oslo, it has been quite an eye-opener to encounter the new style of ministry in the United States called Lovin’ Life. I am grateful to have had the opportunity to serve as an intern in the communications department of the church’s national headquarters from August 15 to Sept. 14, 2011. Some American colleagues have asked me to share something about Unificationist culture on the other side of the Atlantic, so what follows is a snapshot of what’s happening in the “Old Countries.”

Nowhere in Europe do we have a facility as big and extraordinary as the Manhattan Center in which Lovin’ Life Sunday Services take place, nor do we have services broadcasted all over the continent so that thousands of people can view the service every Sunday. The Unification Church in Europe worships and holds church activities somewhat differently than does Lovin’ Life; the main beliefs and traditions of Father Moon are kept the same, but the method used to worship and witness to his teachings varies across Europe.



Norwegian Unificationist Mikael Toresen lectures students on Father Moon’s teachings at Oslo University.

Take my home country, Norway, a small country with 4.8 million people, where the Unification Church has approximately 50 members. It is, however, the only country in which the Unification Movement is supported by the state on a regular basis. For each registered Unificationist, the Church receives approximately \$150 from the authorities each year; the more members the Church has, the more it receives financially. The Norwegian community has received this state support since it registered the Unification Church as a faith organization in 2003.

The reason for this special practice is that Norway has a “state church,” the Lutheran church, which means that the state covers all its expenses. As Norway has become a multi-religious society, Norwegian lawmakers decided some years ago that other faiths should be entitled to the same level of support from the authorities as the state church. Therefore, the amount the Unification Church receives for each member corresponds to the amount the state spends on each member of the state church. If the Norwegian Unification Church community had substantially more members, it would receive financial support for constructing or buying its own church buildings.

In addition, the Universal Peace Federation (UPF) receives financial support from the state for some of its projects, for example, the conferences we organized on September 21, 2010, the “International Day of Peace,” one of the UN-recognized days. The Norwegian authorities actively support peace projects financially.



The Unification Church in Vienna, Austria celebrated the 20th anniversary of the fall of the “Iron Curtain” in June 2009.

YouTube a Factor in Unificationist Outreach

Since last November, the Unification Church in Norway started loading witnessing videos on YouTube. Thousands of people have already watched lectures on Father’s teachings.

Looking further into Europe, the Unification Church in Vienna, Austria has adapted its worship style in order to appeal to younger people. Today, there are between 800 and 1000 Unificationists, of whom 300-400 live in Vienna. Ewald Schenkermayr, 23, an Austria youth leader, explains that the Viennese community has divided the Sunday Services into three groups: one for the adults, one for the youth (age 12-18) and one for Sunday school. A small crew is responsible for each group, but the sermon is always given by someone different. Every first Sunday of the month, there is a youth service for the whole community. This means that the youth plan the service, ask musicians to perform either solo or with the rest of the congregation, and choose a reading from a Holy Scripture; adults and children at these services are simply guests. At the end of each service, an elder couple reads a closing prayer for the whole congregation, followed by two minutes of meditation, while calming songs play in the background.

Not to say there aren't plenty of gatherings of veteran Unificationists as well. The Austrian Church proudly honors the contributions of its members in fighting – and winning – the war of ideas over communism. On June 27, 2009, the Austrian Unification Church marked the 20th anniversary of the fall of communism. Many current Austrian members had followed Father Moon's direction and worked hard to bring communism to an end.

How to increase membership is a perennial topic for the Unification Church in Europe. Albania is a country that stands out in Europe for the marked member growth in the last few years. The small country of only 3.6 million habitants is located in the southeast of Europe, and was the first in the world to declare itself as an atheist country. But after the regime change in 1992, freedom of religion was allowed. Today, there are about 200 Unificationist residing in five of Albania's biggest cities.



Unification Church members in Tirana, Albania invited 76 guests to a 15-day-long seminar on Father Moon's teachings from July 10-25, 2011. 40 of the guests came from Kosovo, one of the neighbor countries.

Successful Witnessing in Albania

The national leader of the Unification Church in Albania, Ghani Roshi, said that last year they had 40 people join the church, and that this year their goal is 50. When I asked, "What is it about the Unification Church in Albania that attracts so many people to join every year?" Roshi explained that they are not doing anything new, but simply following the traditional style of outreaching. They have young, energetic groups of members living in the church centers that go out witnessing every day on the streets. Some of them are fulltime missionaries; others are students and help out as much as they can outside their studies. They invite people to come to the church centers and attend Divine Principle lectures. If the guests like what they are hearing, they are invited back for another lecture, and then eventually to a longer, more detailed seminar.

Roshi invites young, second-generation Unificationists from Europe and the United States to come to Albania for a month or so to experience how the Church is developing there. "A lot of second-generation feel that they can understand their parents better, because they see people joining the church in the same way their parents did," said Roshi.

Furthermore, Albania has close to 1000 Ambassadors for Peace, including former presidents, presidents of NGO's, and scholars at universities.

Roshi's biggest dream for the Unification Church is for it to become financially stable. He says that his goal is to support the Church financially with businesses more than with the donations and fundraisers currently funding it.

When it comes to social activities for young people, a lot of European second-generation from all over Europe come together in the summer and participate in a summer camp. There they study Father Moon's teachings, play sports, and generally strengthen the bonds between the different nations. Youth leaders from Spain, Sweden, England, Germany, and France have told me that they also meet up in their communities at least once a week besides Sunday, using the church as a platform for having common social and spiritual experiences. In addition to having fun, they have discussion groups, lecture practice, and sometimes watch sermons by Rev. In Jin Moon or by Rev. Hyung Jin Moon, the International President of the Unification Church, through which they become more aware of the Church's activities on different continents.