

Los Angeles Unificationists and Friends Rally against Media Abuse of Women

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June 18, 2012



Second-generation Unificationist Renee Shaw was part of the team that hosted Capturing Innocence.

Nearly 100 students of Pasadena City College (PCC), including 25 Unificationists, rallied to raise awareness about the exploitation of women's sexuality in media under the banner of "Capturing Innocence" in the Wifi Lounge at PCC in Los Angeles on Thursday, June 7, 2012.

Second-generation Unificationist Renee Shaw, 20, a resident of Pasadena and a student studying business at PCC, was a driving force behind the event. The idea for putting on such a rally began as an extra-credit project for Shaw's speech class called "Group Communication and Development," she told Unificationnews.com.

"We all had to write essays about different topics, and then we voted on our favorite ones to create an event for. A classmate of mine, Danielle Delgado, wrote one on the exploitation of women in media, and became the project leader. Several classmates and I then began planning an event on this topic," she said. "As I was working, I realized the value of raising awareness about media exploitation. I also realized that there are so many people in the world who have the same vision as Rev. and Mrs. Sun Myung Moon and who have resources that we as Unificationists don't. So, by partnering with them, we could work together to make God's dream come true."

According to Shaw, PCC is home to more than 20 second-generation Unificationists, many of whom connected her and her classmates to various clubs, including the Italian Club, Feminist Club, Student Government, Alpha Gamma Sigma Honor Society, which contributed volunteers, monetary donations and help with publicity towards her event.

Shaw said she worked out a deal by which members of these clubs could receive community-service hours for helping to promote "Capturing Innocence." She added that, "We also persuaded several teachers to give extra credit to those who came. Moreover, the people in my group were well-connected, influential people on campus, and therefore we had connections with campus websites as well as the school newspaper, which published announcements for us. And of course, we announced the event at Lovin' Life Ministries (LLM) Sunday service."

Play it Forward Records, a band composed of Unificationists and guest performers who perform for LLM Sunday service, kicked off "Capturing Innocence" with a musical offering.

Shaw explained: "*Play it Forward* operates as a LLM small group. The people who played at PCC are first- and second-generation Unificationists Matt Ishizuka, John Holmes, Daejo Garrat, Elliot Jones-Locke, Jacob Schnorr, Juliannah Vasquez and Youngsoon Gomez, but the small group, which we call an 'affinity group,' is available to anyone who wants to create music. They really got the audience warmed up for us – people loved them! *Play it Forward* is fun, wholesome, and provides a deeper connection than typical bands."

Attendees then viewed videos that discussed the prevalence of sexual exploitation in media. "The fact is, we don't even realize how widespread it is most of the time," said Shaw. "These videos showed the effects media has on individuals, how even words we use have a sexual connotation, and how so many ads – even for burger joints – show women who are half-naked."

The video viewings were followed by presentations from two nonprofit organizations, Next Generation Academy (NGA), a leadership program for young Unificationists on the West Coast, and the Elephantman Foundation, an organization that works with individuals affected by dysmorphic diseases, such as bulimia and anorexia.

Second-generation Unificationists Sean Calavan, Veronica Musiol and Virginia Orman of NGA talked about personal value and asked their audience whether someone's value can fade away or whether value is something internal and more profound. Their presentation included a video clip featuring Katie Makkai at the National Poetry Slam 2002, who delivered a poem entitled "Pretty," encouraging girls to want to be more than just "pretty" on the surface.

Gustavo Bueno, a second-year PCC student and non-Unificationist, said, "I saw powerful images and videos that really made me think. A *Dove* transformational video revealed how a normal woman is transformed into a billboard model. It's amazing. The event was interactive, and now I realize the importance of appreciating a woman for her value as a person, rather than just looking at her face."

Pastor George Kazakos, head of Los Angeles' LLM, praised "Capturing Innocence" with the following statement: "[The event] was a very effective way to take the message of purity, which can seem distant for most, and package it in a way that is edgy and fun with videos, testimonies and other visuals. What I found was awesome was that it was all initiated by PCC students, Unificationist and non-Unificationist. It wasn't a top-down event, but one that came from the heart."

Michael Holmes, the youth pastor for LLM in Los Angeles, called the event "natural witnessing at its best" and said that it "showed that we Unificationists are excellent in educating people and sharing about the core of human beings."



The Los Angeles "Dream Team"

Shaw currently lives at the Los Angeles Unification Church Headquarters, known as Pasadena House, as a member of the "Dream Team," a group of seven young Unificationists who dedicate 20 hours of volunteer service a week to support the local LLM in exchange for housing.

"My official title is Volunteer Coordinator. Long story short, I make possibilities into realities, and I take care of people," Shaw laughed. "I ask people what they want to do for the ministry and then try to make that happen. I write letters of recommendation and document service hours. I also help with general administrative church work and organize front-of-house operations during Sunday Service."

Some of the other responsibilities of the Dream Team include helping with affinity groups, family education, young-adult education, and youth education and volunteering during Sunday service.

Shaw hopes that "Capturing Innocence" is the first event of many to come and plans to use such events as opportunities for outreach. "What was most beautiful for me about the 'Capturing Innocence' event was seeing all sorts of organizations working together. A lot of the times, it feels like we're 'Unificationists against the world,' but the essence of Unificationism is unifying people. My goal was to get as many Unificationists together as possible, so that people could see what kind of relationships we have with one another, and in that way, start asking questions about our movement.

"In the past year, I've brought six guests to Lovin' Life Sunday service. Since I'm the volunteer coordinator here and because HSA-UWC [the Holy Spirit Association for the Unification of World Christianity] is a registered nonprofit organization, we can give out service hours. I've invited a few of my non-Unificationist friends to usher, and eventually I want to have them help with office work or even become affinity-group leaders. That way, they will be able to do the things they love and get service hours at the same time! Service hours can be a big plus on your resume, and if we can help someone's future and have them join Lovin' Life in the process, why not?"