

A Yoga Missionary from Europe Becomes a Key Leader in Asia

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David and Ursula McLackland

Ursula McLackland was one of the very first people to join in a nation being pioneered by the missionaries that went out in 1975. Because of her German origins, many people think she was one of the first missionaries herself. But the stories of those who joined our church in the early days are as inspiring and touching, and filled with courage, as those of the missionaries who braved the unknown to find them.

At the end of my training as a Yoga missionary in India in 1975, the Indian immigration office ordered me to leave the country for Sri Lanka, even though I had no money and did not know anybody there. However, our Heavenly Parent took care of me through a Sri Lankan family and I started to witness for my Yoga group. I thought God had sent me to Sri Lanka to start

my Yoga group there; however, not long afterwards I met our Unification missionaries and instead of them becoming my first members, I became their first member.

It was on August 16, 1975 that I had a powerful spiritual experience: After listening to Chapter 16 of the Divine Principle, I started to fast and pray telling God that I would not eat unless He told me whom I should follow, True Parents or my Yoga teacher. On the 5th day of my fast, while I was praying in a Catholic church, a marriage ceremony began. At that moment God told me that it has been His dream from the beginning of human history to build an ideal family and that I should follow True Parents and get blessed in the future. In utter excitement and joy, I ran to the center and told the missionaries that I was ready to join them giving up my dream of being a Yoga nun for the rest of my life.



The center in Sri Lanka that we moved into just after I and a Sri Lankan couple joined the 3 original missionaries to Sri Lanka in 1975

From that moment, there was no turning back. Due to repeated visa problems, I assisted the missionaries in Sri Lanka and various neighboring countries for the first 3 years. I witnessed their tremendous suffering and struggle to lay a foundation in their mission countries. The most perplexing question for

them was how to unite. True Father had not assigned any Cain and Abel positions but told them that they were like three unfallen brothers. They wondered how restoration could take place without Cain/Abel relationships. It took several years to settle the issue of leadership in each nation. In the meantime, many missionaries had fallen away. True Father's direction not to die but to stay in their mission country or any other country nearby took on a deep meaning for me. Being a member and not a missionary myself, I felt I was not undergoing the same intense struggles as they did but was called to testify to their pain, dedication and unchanging love for the mission countries. I tried my best to support and comfort them in any way I could.



Vietnamese missionary with early missionaries from Southeast Asia in front of the Thailand center

In Thailand, I helped to pioneer street witnessing. Not knowing the language, I copied the question "Are you interested in lectures about the purpose of life? Please come to our center at ..." in Thai language on strips of paper and gave them to people on the street. As it was an arduous affair for a foreigner to copy the complicated Thai script, we soon developed the idea of printing simple witnessing cards which were used for many years to come. Eventually many members joined.



Two missionaries to India, one to Sri Lanka plus Ursula in front of the Indian center in 1976 or 1977

The first workshop that I ever attended was the international 40-day workshop in New York in 1980. It was a life-changing experience. It was my first time in America and my very first visit to True Parents' home in Belvedere. We had hoped to meet Ye Jin Nim representing the True Family but when she couldn't meet us, I tried to smell, taste and touch True Parents and the True Family through the rocks, trees and flowers at Belvedere. I knew that True Parents had walked through this very same garden and admired the same flowers that I was admiring now. That was my closest experience with True Parents until that time.

Later the same year, I got a call from my central figure Rev. Jack Hart that True Father was going to start the matching in New York and asked me whether I was ready to accept any match True Father would give me. When I said 'yes', he gave in my picture for the matching: a passport size photo and another postcard size photo stuck on a paper with the caption "Ursula Wagenhoff, Thailand" – that was the only blessing application I ever had. One or two days later, I got another call from Jack Hart saying that I was surely matched but he could not find out to whom and I should start praying as True Father was going to start the Holy Wine Ceremony very soon. This was the most difficult prayer in my life. I was matched but did not know anything about my future spouse, not even his name, age or nationality. It took me another 6 weeks to find out that my spouse was David McLackland, a British brother in Ocean Church and another 6 months to see the first photo of him. But this did not matter. My greatest joy was to hear from him that when he received my photo from True Father, he first bowed to True Father in grateful acceptance and only afterwards looked at my photo. This was exactly what I had wanted to do. I was so happy that my husband had the same mind-set.

Though my husband only poured a little Holy Wine on my photo, I felt a substantial change in my being. In fact, a lot of my fallen nature came out and I had to struggle for many years to overcome it. I realized that this is our Heavenly Parent's way to help us remove our fallen nature.



Ursula with True Mother in India during her world speaking tour, 1993

Eventually, I met True Parents for the first time at our Blessing Ceremony at Madison Square Garden in 1982, 7 years after joining the church. The most vivid memory I have was of True Father talking to all of us the following morning. He mentioned that True Mother had been too tired to come with him in the early morning but that he had requested her to come a little later. Only when I gave birth by Caesarian many years later, did I come to understand a little bit of True Mother's incredible pain standing for hours sprinkling the brides and grooms with Holy Water just 2 weeks after giving birth to her 14th child-by Caesarian section. Nobody can fully understand her suffering at that time. Even then, True Father pushed her to come and share breakfast with us the next morning. So great is True Parents' love for us.

True Father mentioned jokingly that he was sorry for having blessed us and that he feels now lonely because now we only care for our spouses and forget about True Parents. We can never forget our beloved True Parents' heart and love through which we are reborn!

When I recently looked at our blessing photos, I realized that we were blessed in a different era. We were truly heavenly soldiers. All sisters were dressed uniformly in the same wedding dress selected by True Mother with the same veil and hardly any make-up. Most of us had just come from MFT a few days ago and would go back a few days later. I remember my greatest fear was to lose sight of my husband because I might not recognize him among the 2,000 blond-haired grooms in dark-blue suits and red neck-tie. It was the very first time I ever met him but it was also the time when God told me that he loved my husband and trusted him.

Today's blessing ceremonies are so different. The young brides excitedly prepare their own unique wedding dresses and spend all night having their hair and make-up done by professionals so that they will look their best on this most important day in their lives.

It is our joy now to help our children get ready for their Blessing. Our couple is very fortunate because True Father selected two wonderful grooms for our two daughters through the Cheon Il Guk matching. Our children were born in Asia and grew up in different mission countries in Asia so I expected them to be matched to any race or nationality throughout the world. When True Father selected a German spouse for our eldest daughter, I realized that Germany was my enemy nation, the birth country that I had left at the age of 21 never to return to. Our son-in-law and his family are the very opposite of all the negative stereotypes I have against Germans. We are now proud grandparents of two beautiful German grand-daughters. Our only regret is that we cannot spend enough time with them because of our mission in Asia.



David and Ursula's first meeting, just before the Blessing

Having lived more than 40 years in Asia, we appreciate the warm hearts of the Asian people, their heart of filial piety and love for their families. Our home is in Asia and we want to help our Heavenly Parent and True Parents to usher in Cheon Il Guk. Asia has so much to offer to the world and we deeply understand why True Father proclaimed that the new age would start from the Asia-Pacific region. Our deepest desire is that a new wind of hope and inspiration will blow from Asia to all parts of the world and give resurrection to all our members and blessed families, especially to those whose hearts have grown tired over many years of struggle and disappointment.

As the director of the Blessed Family Department in Asia, I want to support our Regional President's couple in their desire to guide all of our second generation members to a genuine life of faith, public commitment and successful Blessing. Now is the crucial time, as our older second generation members reach the Blessing. Their example will be a model and inspiration for the younger ones. The efforts of the Philippine movement to have their own school and college as a healthy environment for our second generation to grow up in are now bearing fruit with the older second generation members taking ownership in guiding their younger brothers and sisters. In Thailand, older blessed children are also taking up a public life style and we have great hope for the future.

Even in Indonesia where many blessed families went through a long dark period they now feel new hope. I also thank True Mother for training our new National Leader, his wife, and core members through the Asian Top Gun workshops. Through them, our members can feel a new atmosphere in the Indonesian church and we expect great developments to take place soon.

We are deeply grateful to our beloved True Mother for giving us Special Grace through the 4 Great Holy Items. We can see revival and new inspiration among our blessed families in throughout Asia.



A three-generational family