

Maio Baiocco's New Small-Group Curriculum Helps Members Resolve Sensitive Personal Issues

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A small-group meeting series called “The Choice,” which recently concluded its trial run at the Learning Center (4 West 43rd Street) in New York City, has been gathering interest from members and leaders within the local Unificationist community. The host of the small group is second-generation Unificationist Maio Baiocco, a current employee at Family Federation for World Peace and Unification (FFWPU) USA, who created an entire written curriculum for The Choice.

“I was hired as the National Director for Community Care under Lovin’ Life Ministries in August of 2012,” said Baiocco. “At that time, I was tasked by Rev. In Jin Moon to expand the ‘Getting Back on Track’ ministry and develop a recovery ministry, as our church currently doesn’t offer any programs to help members struggling with addiction. This exciting new ministry was known as ‘Life 180.’ After the end of Lovin’ Life, there were a lot of questions as to what would happen to Community Care and Life 180.”

In October of 2012, Baiocco began a 40-day condition of studying the Divine Principle, and she says that it was through this process that she became aware of FFWPU’s lack of focus on God’s “First Blessing,” that is, to “Be fruitful” (Genesis 1:28).

“We have been tasked by our Heavenly Parent to ‘Be fruitful’ in order to become the children that God could be proud of,” said Baiocco. “However, this process is difficult and uncomfortable, so we tend to skip that one and move on to the other two. True Parents are always asking us to have mind-body unity, but I felt like we needed some practical applications on how to do that. We’re often so focused on the Marriage Blessing that we tend to ignore this challenging concept.

“By November of 2012, I was increasingly concerned that our church wasn’t ready to receive people’s secrets with an open mind. Rev. In Jin Moon’s situation had turned into a witch hunt, and it became an extremely judgmental scenario. I shared my concerns with Dr. Balcomb and in frustration I said, ‘People in our church are not ready to receive others’ hearts and their pain. If this is their reaction, then our members are safer attending anonymous programs to work on their problems. I believe that as a movement we need a cultural shift.’”

Using material from the Saddleback Church’s program, “Life’s Healing Choices,” through which Pastor Rick Warren led his congregation to encourage an environment of acceptance and honesty, as well as from other sources including the Bible, the Divine Principle and Rev. Sun Myung Moon’s teachings, Baiocco created The Choice.

“By January 2013, Foundation Day was coming and with it was grace and forgiveness for all of the members of our movement. Forgiveness can fall very flat if we don’t do some self-analysis and find out what we feel we need forgiveness for. Understanding that The Choice would offer people a chance to take an honest look at where they were really at with their life of faith, I held the first small group study on January 6th. Unresolved issues in our lives – whether it’s with our family, our job, our self-image or our past – can translate into negative behaviors and reckless choices that damage our marriage, our family, and ultimately, our relationship with God. We all have something that we are less than proud of, and therefore, we encouraged the participants to talk about in their respective failings in a supportive environment. People were under no obligation to disclose anything they didn’t feel comfortable sharing.”

Participants first make the choice to commit to attending the small-group meetings and keep confidential what was discussed in them. Each session is started as one large group to hear the topic for that week, and then participants are broken up into smaller discussion groups based on gender and life experiences, such as the “mother’s group,” “sisters’ group,” etc. Halfway through the ten-week program, participants make the choice to “Reveal,” that is, to take an honest look at their fears, resentment, misuse of love, and for what part of their pain they need to take responsibility. “Reveal” involves writing out one’s thoughts, and each has the opportunity to share as much or as little as he or she likes. From there, participants make a list of people from whom they need to ask forgiveness and to whom they need to make amends, which, according to Baiocco, facilitates much of the “natural conversation” in a relationship.

“The Choice came at the perfect time for me in my life,” said participant Victoria Roomet, president of Collegiate Association for the Research of Principles (CARP). “I had been feeling pretty weighed down by my circumstances and was looking to start taking baby steps towards a happier and more balanced life. The Choice helped me do that – guided

me in a very soft way each week and encouraged me to work through issues that sometimes I was just too immature or lazy to work through. I felt very safe and loved the bonds of sisterhood that my group formed. I see this as a practical tool for anyone struggling with the First Blessing, which is basically everyone.”



“This was the first time I led a small group in our church, and I was a little nervous, but overall, the experience was really fulfilling,” Baiocco said. “We talked about God’s character and how we as His children can tap into that power if we are one with Him. In our church, we tend to look for others to be our vertical point, our center, but really, God is in each and every one of us. When we force leadership up on high pedestals, they’re doomed from the start. No one, but our True Parents, can live up to that kind of pressure.

“We had a mix of ten first- and second-generation Unificationists as participants this time, and the feedback was very positive, and I personally thoroughly enjoyed being a part of it.”

Participant Chelsea Legay, a second-generation Unificationist currently a student at St. John’s, said, “What The Choice provided for me was a place in the middle of the week where I could feel accepted for who I am and where I’m at. The group was very genuine; everybody was honest whenever they shared, and Maio was a committed group leader who created this kind of warm and welcoming atmosphere. The content for me wasn’t what was so important as much as the experience of just talking to other people and finding that others are on the same page or not on the same page as I am, and that either was OK.”

Participant Linda Lee Marchant Perry, who is Baiocco’s mother, said, “In this time of so much change, The Choice helped me focus on my relationship with God as the foundation for everything I am and do. It was like a light shining in my life, showing me where all the cobwebs in the corners were. During the course of The Choice, I was at Sunday Service, and I really prayed that God would be in me. I suddenly felt this warm light all around me, and I could see the shape of my body being full of this light. There was still one small dark area, which represented the residue I had to address, and The Choice helped me see it and work on it.”

Baiocco hopes that one of the participants from this session of The Choice will feel called to lead the next session.

As she explains it, “Because of the way it is written, it can be done for a small group or a very large one,” she said. “The only important thing to note is that all small-group discussions are gender specific. If you have a mixed group, you will need to identify small-group facilitators to manage the discussions.

“I really want our community to use The Choice. It provides a comfortable, systematic approach to taking an honest look at where the holes are in your life. I know that there’s been a lot of material that’s come out of Headquarters, and a lot of times in the past, people have expressed being tired of receiving these materials, but I sense that there is a need for this kind of experience. I invite everyone to give it a try and see if it can help. I am committed to supporting our members in having a healthier life of faith, and my sincere hope is that this is just the beginning,” Baiocco said.

The written curriculum for The Choice will be available after the “Lead with Impact” meeting to take place in April 2013 for Unificationist pastors around the United States.