

## Church growth through Oikos Witnessing in Brazil

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*Desiring that knowledge of True Parents spreads throughout Brazil, many members attend a seminar on small groups*

Recently, we are beginning to see the effects of person to person Divine Principle lecturing and the *oikos* witnessing method on our home group activities in Brazil. (*Oikos* is Greek for "house" or "home." We adopted the method from Christians.

The *oikos* approach emphasizes developing solid relationships with people that you naturally encounter -- neighbors, fellow club members, etc., before introducing one's religious beliefs.) Members are rediscovering hope that they can succeed in witnessing.



*Rev. Sasaki's wife Ok Nan Choi (seated) with a small group that is active in Brazil*

FFWPU Brazil conducted research for three and a half years on how best to conduct activities. This research helps a large church focus on its role, while small groups are encouraged to concentrate on

resolving issues that the larger church cannot handle. Hence, Brazil has been working to build an ideal framework within which large churches and small groups enter into a mutually beneficial relationship.



*Members of two Brazilian home groups, named Star and Heart*

### **The Family Kingdom of Heaven**

FFWPU-Brazil calls its Hoon Dok family churches "home groups" based on these quotations from Father and others on family church:

*"Family church' is a term that originated in the Garden of Eden." "The origin of family church begins is the complete unity of unfallen Adam and Eve centered on God in the Garden of Eden." "Family church, which could not be achieved in the Garden of Eden, went through many diverse historical ages and after going through the necessary sacrifices, the door to family church finally opened in Rev. Moon's time."*



*Person to person lecture involves taking turns reading Exposition of Divine Principle*

Home groups first aim at enabling the members of each family to establish the kingdom of heaven in their lives. Each of these families will practice the basic elements of life in the kingdom of heaven, such as living a life of gratitude and repentance. The first task, however, is to resolve resentment over past experiences and hurt feelings that have accumulated in one's heart. For different reasons, in the course of leading their lives of faith, some members end up feeling resentful toward the church. Hence, the church in Brazil has strengthened internal education so that by gaining victory through love in home group activities, members can learn how to divest themselves of their resentment.

The next thing that is emphasized is internal witnessing; that is, witnessing first to oneself and to our own fellow home group members. Before witnessing to others, we guide home group members to work on changing themselves. Once our members in the home group become one and the group overflows with love, witnessing to outsiders (external witnessing) will naturally develop.



*A Home Group Festival*

Victoriously overcoming the Cain– Abel relationship through love within the church is training for couples in resolving any problems or conflicts that may occur between them later. To the extent of their success at this, they will also be able to develop the capacity to resolve parent–child problems. Furthermore, such success in love will enable members (once they reach the stage of witnessing to outsiders) to develop their capacity to love, as spiritual parents, those in the Cain-position and to induce those in the Cain-position to naturally surrender. Home group activities have been structured so that members can be trained and grow in these four aspects at the same time.

Through seminars and presentations on the vision of how home groups can multiply, we guide members not to regard home group activities merely as a witnessing system or another new activity but to see it as a means to also achieve individual perfection; we teach them that carrying out home group activities requires conviction and determination. During these seminars, individual perfection and the significance of the public course as they appear in Divine Principle are interpreted in light of home groups. We guide blessed families to carry out activities, setting up detailed goals in areas such as unity between the husband and wife and the education of their children.

### **Changing Oneself Is Important**

Witnessing works well in home groups not because it is a great system. Instead, witnessing works when members of the home group experience change within themselves and development of their love. A husband or wife that struggles for a long time, generally tries to change the other partner and may end up feeling worn out when they see no change in the other. It is no easy feat to change someone or to even change oneself.

When one grows a level higher by changing oneself, the person can create an opportunity for his or her partner to change. It is not a matter of the problem being with one's partner, because the situation changes once one's own love grows. That is why members in home groups are carrying out activities with the slogan, "Change myself first." If a partner overcomes a part of his or her personality that has been a problem in the struggling relationship between the couple, the buoyance resulting from this victory will raise the other partner, enabling him or her to easily gain victory too.



(In suits, left to right) Dong Mo Shin, regional president, South America; Neudir Simão Ferabolli, Latin America, UPF Secretary-General

In contrast, when the partner fails to change and shows fallen nature, this may trigger more fallen nature from the other partner. Instead of trying to change the partner, focus on changing oneself; by doing that, the partner will also change. Even if the partner is not a church member, repeating this process several times can move the partner to join the church.

Many people practiced this through their home group activities -- a wife who could not witness to her husband for fourteen years could finally move her husband's heart and they were able to receive the blessing.

Such testimonies abound. Someone that had succeeded at expanding a home group to the third level (from one group to two, two to four and four to eight) had tried to witness to his relatives as part of his tribal messiah activities for the past ten or so years without much result. Thanks to home group activities, the person was successful at witnessing to his relatives in his neighborhood.

A wife that was successful at expanding her home group to level two said she could not love her husband for a few years because whenever she would go home, he would always be lying down and watching television until late at night, not even raising a finger to help with the housework, resulting in frequent fights. When she tried to fulfill her weekly goal she realized that the problem might not be with her husband but with herself.

After she started home group activities, she concentrated on the goal of having dominion over herself first. She realized that the problem might be with her and not her husband and tried to remove her fallen nature and develop her love. After a certain time, she experienced a turning point through which she overcame her difficulty and felt heavenly love enter her heart. Her husband, who was lying on the sofa watching TV as usual, looked unbearably lovely in her eyes.

Later, her husband suddenly lost his desire to watch TV and would do chores such as washing the dishes without even being asked to. There were other families that saw positive changes through home groups. Once a "bowl of love" developed as these families carried out home group activities many distant church members started coming back.

Within a period of less than a year, around 120 people had returned. We realized that even if some people have difficulties going to church, the number of people coming to home groups wasn't small. Through such home group activities, the basic structure and culture of our church has changed. A culture of the heart through which one yearns for one's brothers and sisters centered on our Heavenly Parent has formed.

### Home Groups and Lecturing

With an increasing number of people seeing success in love within their home groups, members across Brazil are becoming more motivated to witness. Through person to person lectures using *Exposition of Divine Principle*, regular members are also becoming Divine Principle lecturers. We have heard of mass production but not much about mass restoration.

Even though the ability of members giving a person to person lecture may not be the same as that of full-time lecturers in workshop centers, they can restore the one person by reading the Divine Principle carefully. Hence, if everyone were doing this, there would be as many Divine Principle lecturers as the number of members across the nation and Divine Principle lectures would be given every day in Brazil even during periods without workshops. Furthermore, members that mainly sent people to workshops during mobilizations would have the opportunity to raise their spiritual children personally.

Another benefit is that achieving the home group goal of gaining dominion over oneself is closely connected to victory in witnessing. One advantage of witnessing through a one-on-one lecture is that the lecturing time spent to make the target person into a church member is also the time through which the person is fostered into a new Divine Principle lecturer.

If the person that is being witnessed to becomes a member after reading the whole book, he or she, as a new lecturer, can witness to another person in the same manner. Of course, we cannot say that all members that are witnessed to become person to person lecturers. Yet, since the new member spends around thirty hours with one's spiritual parent in order to read the Divine Principle from the beginning to end, he or she would be familiar with the method and would know that they can implement the same method when witnessing to another person. In contrast, it is not common to see participants who have just completed a Divine Principle workshop immediately become Divine Principle lecturers.

The time needed to finish the whole book through person to person lectures may differ among people, but it usually takes between two to three months, or at times six months. Let us assume that the whole book is read within three months. If five hundred people were witness to another five hundred people taking three months to restore them, the same length of time would be need for a thousand people to witness to another thousand people through person to person lectures. Even if the number of target people increases, the time it takes to witness to them would be the same. Hence, no matter what nation it may be, once the person to person lecture tradition is established, since the spiritual child has the capacity to lecture and several cycles of the process are possible in a year, the potential exists for explosive growth over time.

A phenomenon that has occurred through person to person lectures in Brazil is that the spiritual parents themselves feel resurrected and feel the urge to witness of their own volition. In other words, by lecturing to one's spiritual children individually, the spiritual parents themselves read as much and feel resurrected as a result.

Furthermore, because they read it with their spiritual children, they experience God's earnest love and work of salvation, unlike when they read it alone. In addition, whenever there is a question, the spiritual parent can write it down immediately on the relevant page of *Exposition of Divine Principle* and this will become a unique lecture outline for that spiritual parent. After lecturing in this style once or twice, most members become confident in giving lectures.

Some people educate their own children on a person to person level. Testimonies about how both parents and children have been deeply moved from the very first day, shedding tears as they read the Divine Principle, have also been given.

### **Oikos (Life-Sphere Witnessing)**

*Oikos* witnessing implies witnessing within the sphere of one's life and witnessing to one's connections. In other words, not going somewhere distant to witness to someone you don't know but regarding all those in one's life as people to witness to and living accordingly. In order to do that, a member should be able to continuously invest in people around him or her and be dedicated to each step of the process -- first becoming an affectionate friend; second, gaining trust and respect, thus developing a close friendship and finally being someone in whom others can confide and from whom others seek advice.

Unlike the method of going somewhere outside one's sphere and meeting that one person guided by God amidst a crowd on the street, this method starts from the idea of loving people within one's own sphere and becoming a person that they acknowledge. If a home group fulfilled its weekly goal and the spiritual parents grew, witnessing within their spheres would be easy. By overcoming one's difficulty, one can help those who are still in that boat, making it possible to witness to them.

### **To Realize Vision 2020**

Chances for experiencing explosive witnessing results are higher when three elements -- Hoon Dok family churches, person to person teaching and *oikos* witnessing -- are being done concurrently. Being in a home group helps members heal internally; members will also learn how to witness to themselves and those within the group and how to overcome one challenge after another, enabling home group members to increase their capacity to love and be happy. When this happens, those in the neighborhood will find the small groups appealing.

Based on this foundation, home group members would love those connected to them in life or through *oikos* witnessing and the home group would be able to play the role of an institution that raises those people that become connected through a person to person lectures.

When this takes place, it is ideal. If the witnessing goal is set at a thousand people per year, achieving it would result in only thirty thousand more members after thirty years. This pace, however, is too slow, and it won't be possible to have any influence on the national level. Hence, instead of setting up a goal of restoring a certain number of people per year, the church in Brazil focuses on how to bring about explosive witnessing even if it takes some time.

Once home groups and person to person teaching is firmly established, countries with many members will see quick growth.

Brazil is still at the beginning phase of this development and still needs to work on maintaining continuous growth such as by developing intensive education for those who join the church after being witnessed to. We will do everything in our might to live up to the expectations of the True Parents of Heaven, Earth and Humankind.