

## Interview of Michael Balcomb on his experiences with True Mother

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*A week after the events in Vienna, Austria that brought European and Middle Eastern members together in an unprecedented outreach campaign, we interviewed Europe and Middle East regional group chairman Dr. Michael Balcomb in Korea. One part of his interview appeared in a recent issue of the online True Peace magazine. The part of the interview that follows here is drawn from Dr. Balcomb's testimony of his experiences with True Mother, both in the context of the Vienna events and in light of various personal meetings and observations.*

### **Holding events with True Mother**

Two years ago, our American Church family held the fortieth anniversary of the Yankee Stadium rally at Belvedere. It was outdoors, and just as at Yankee Stadium [in 1976], it rained. But it didn't rain until the very second Mother finished her speech. Several thousand members gathered that day, and we were tremendously excited to have True Parents back at Belvedere, just like in the old days, and to have Mother speaking on this

auspicious anniversary.

We had made it into a real festival: we had many different types of food, and displays about all kinds of projects. We opened the Belvedere House to the public, and welcomed many of our neighbors and friends onto the estate.

After that success, we realized that we needed to make a bigger and better offering, and following the lead of Korea, Japan and Thailand, we were able to fill Madison Square Garden in New York. It was the first time in many years to have such a large gathering.



Immediately following the great success of the "Peace Starts with Me" rally in Madison Square Garden last July, True Mother assigned our couple to Europe and the Middle East. From the very beginning, she

was interested in holding a similar “rally of hope” in Europe as well and it was our goal to make it happen as soon as possible.

In the early stages of planning, one of the questions Mother asked us, through the international headquarters, was, “You are aiming to bring ten thousand people, but if you do, are they all going to be members?” I replied, “No, Mother. At most, half will be members, because that’s all we have. So the other half will have to be people we witness to, or friends or relatives.” That was what True Mother wanted to hear. She wanted to hear that we would attempt to find new people. We felt a great deal of support from True Mother for the Vienna event from the very beginning, and I think that’s what made our victory possible.



### **Making a personal connection with True Mother**

My own relationship with True Mother has developed and deepened over the last five years since she assigned me as church president in the US. Before that, we always saw Father and Mother together, and usually it was Father who did most of the talking.

Until quite recently, I didn’t see True Mother all that often. In the beginning, I’m afraid that I allowed this to be kind of an obstacle. I was very passive about the situation and didn’t make enough effort to communicate. I thought to myself, “Well, if I go to a meeting, and Mother calls me to give a report—and she often would—that’s when I’ll share, but otherwise I will keep quiet.” But gradually I learned from the North American regional group chair Dr. Ki-hoon Kim that it is much better to be constantly sharing with Mother. He would always update her with good news, successes small and large, news of difficulties overcome by our blessed families and more. I came to realize how much Mother really cares about members’ lives. She is always very interested to hear how God is working.

When we came to Europe, we felt, it was a priority to encourage members to realize that they have the freedom to interact with True Mother through sending reports and testimonies. The International Headquarters has been helpful with this, because people like Mr. Hyunook Seo and others have made sure that reports are translated (perhaps sometimes shortened) and presented to True Mother on a regular basis.

We are always encouraging members, starting with the regional presidents, the church leaders and all brothers and sisters, to feel free to write a short message to True Mother to tell her what’s going on in their lives. They share if something good has happened—or if they had a realization from something True Mother said in a speech that touched their hearts. We tell everyone: “Don’t keep it to yourself; share it!” In the beginning, of course people were a little shy and reluctant, but as we got into the habit, it has become second nature.

My experience with Mother has been that whenever I make effort to communicate with her and share with her regularly I feel closer and spiritually connected, even if she never says a word. I often receive intuition from God. In those meetings I have had with Mother where she has given some direct personal

guidance or shared about her own life, I have always made a point to share that content with others in Sunday services and sermons.



### **Mother's candid sharing about her course in life**

There is one particular incident I remember, many years ago now. True Mother invited a few of us for tea at Cheon Jeong Gung. There, she started talking about her childhood and her youth, particularly about the circumstances leading up to her being matched and engaged to Father. I recall her saying, that this was really no simple thing. First of all, many spiritualists had told her "You are going to be married to someone more than twenty years older than you." And then some of them went on to tell her: "And that person could either be a great saint or a great criminal; there is really no way to know which!" That is not exactly what anyone wants to hear as a young girl!

I remember Mother saying something like, "I decided myself that if this was to be my destiny I would embrace it, and I make sure that our couple would take the course of sainthood; that no matter who God matched me to, I would not just be passive and take things as they came, but I would take personal responsibility."

I have shared that story several times, and I was getting a little worried that I might have ended up embellishing it. But then at the youth celebration the day after the "Peace Starts with Me" Rally of Hope in Vienna, Mother spoke to 800 to 900 young people and started out by asking them about this very point.

"How many of you here are 17 years old?" she asked, "And how would you feel if you were told you were going to marry someone 23 years older than you?" There was a sudden silence in the room! For young people who are still single, to contemplate such a thing is of course very difficult. I think that encounter helped everyone to see Mother as she was when she was a young woman—like Joan of Ark—bravely accepting a course when only God knows how it will work out.

Father is not here now to share his own experience of this, but we do have the new volumes of Mother's speeches and True Father's words about Mother, in which Father's love and admiration for Mother, and for the course she walked, shine through.

It is very refreshing that Mother is so direct and candid about the real challenge of taking on such a responsibility. When True Mother looks at the second generation today, she sees herself as she was 60 years ago. She wants these wonderful young people to make the kind of commitment to God that she herself made.

### **Mother's concern and advice**

After Mother arrived in Vienna, we had breakfast with her each morning. This was an opportunity to report to Mother about what had happened the day before. In response, True Mother felt free—just as Father always did—to make suggestions and give directions. Actually, I feel that her suggestions are

always directions, but she expresses them in such a loving way, so that you feel, “I would really like to do that because Mother has suggested it!”

Mother was particularly interested and concerned with the safe arrival of the members who came by bus from far-away locations such as Moscow, Minsk and Tirana. The group from Moscow travelled the furthest, and bus breakdowns and border difficulties turned it into a 60-hour marathon. True Mother said that their faith and commitment moved her deeply.

One morning, Mother suggested that we should follow up, not only with the people who had come to the Vienna event but also with the people who did not come, those who had said they would come but then something happened to prevent them. Mother said, “Don’t give up on them. You can go to see these people and share with them what I said; show them pictures of people having a great time. You never know. Those people may even be more responsive. They wanted to come but then they didn’t. What you mustn’t do is just move on. The seeds have been planted but they need to be watered; they need to be cared for.”

Another piece of advice Mother gives is that you have to dream big. “I have a big dream for Europe,” she said. “Ten thousand came yesterday, but what if those ten thousand brought another ten thousand?” Indeed, True Mother is very confident that we really are on the verge of some dramatic breakthrough. The time is right and if we plant the seeds now, a big harvest is coming. Our European family is working hard to believe that completely.

I said to Mother at breakfast one morning that I thought her coming to Vienna had moved the providence forward by ten or twenty years. It allowed us, for example, to start the IAPD, to start YSP, to have a youth assembly with a thousand young people—each of which, if we had done them sequentially, and separately might have taken a year to prepare. With the momentum of True Mother’s visit, we could do them all in two days. There was a tremendous synergy!



### **A special welcome for True Mother**

True Mother always says, “Seeing once is better than hearing a thousand times.” Our results speak for themselves. Not only was the Vienna StadtHalle full, but people clearly had a great time. When True Mother gave her speech, everyone listened very attentively and many asked for the transcript afterwards.

I was particularly moved by Dr. Werner Fasslabend, the former Austria defense minister. He gave probably the nicest introduction of True Mother I have seen from any public figure. Sometimes VIPs give their speech and then leave the stage, which is awkward, because then Mother is coming onto the stage alone. In contrast, Dr. Fasslabend stayed right there at the podium, warmly welcomed Mother and shook her hand, thanked her for bringing a message from God, and wished her good luck. Dr. Fasslabend’s heart had been moved by Mother: She had taken a photo with him and his wife Martina just before the event began.

We also had a nice letter of support and encouragement from a member of the Habsburg family, once the ruling family in Austria. Even though we couldn't match Senegal in terms of having the head of state present at the program, nevertheless True Mother received a very good welcome representing all the people of Austria.

### **Mother's way of challenging people**

Mother gave a great speech. She was very clear about where Christianity has fallen short, but she did it in a way that made the Christians and all of the audience feel "Well, we should do something about that." Over breakfast one morning I shared with True Mother about the choir of several hundred devout Christians who had come to sing for her. She gave them an invitation and opportunity to do something new, not to repeat the mistakes of the past. This is Mother's gift from God, to let people feel they still have a chance to do something valuable. The way she does it is loving and firm, not judgmental or confrontational. It feels like being tapped on the shoulder by your Mum because you got a bad grade at school, and being told "You can do a little better, can't you?"



### **True Mother does not shy away from her responsibility**

Mother is a true student of God. I think people don't recognize this enough, which is why sometimes there is controversy about some of her statements. To give an example, Mother is on record as saying something like "Father didn't educate me; I had to learn for myself."

I think I know what she means. Father came first and he fulfilled his responsibility. He was the one who discovered the Divine Principle; who went to prison and was tortured. He comforted God, the Heavenly Parent in a way that no one has ever been able to do before. Yet he always knew that he could not do it alone, as a single man. He needed to meet the woman with whom, together, he could become True Father and True Parent.

In this course, it wasn't just about True Father. How could it be? True Mother also had her own responsibility. There were things Father could say, but there were also many things he couldn't say directly, and that she had to find out for herself. That is entirely natural. Everyone has responsibility.

What I learned from Mother is that you have to actively seek out your responsibility. You just can't sit back, and think, "Maybe the responsibility will pass by on the other side of the street." If you have made a commitment to God, you have to cross that street and meet your fate and your destiny. And what I see Mother doing, particularly in the last five years, is crossing the street to confront her destiny, to tackle the issues our movement faces with confidence that we are going to win.

### **Mother gives us confidence to succeed**

We are not here just to make up numbers or go through the motions, we are here to win. I have an expression: "We are God's winning team." My wife Fumiko likes it a lot. And I really think it is true. We have to keep in mind that the Messiah comes as the True Parents to bring victory for God at the end of history. Mother is now carrying that task. I feel Father's presence very strongly within her. If we are not convinced that we can gain victory, what are we doing? But if we are convinced, I think God is going to bring us across the finish line. That is the feeling I have tried to give brothers and sisters in Europe: we are going to win!