

Evangelical, Congregational and Blessed

Tyler Hendricks
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Our Unification movement exemplifies two church models, and serves as a case study of their effect on church growth. Church growth has regular causes that can be discerned by examining churches that are growing. Church decline also has regular causes that can be discerned by examining churches that are shrinking. The defining characteristic of most growing churches is that they have one mission, that being evangelism, and congregational polity. Most shrinking churches have multiple missions and hierarchical polity.



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For a church to have an evangelical mission means the church is organized to proclaim the good news (the “evangel”) and to bring others to salvation through it. Congregational polity means that the members of the local church own and govern the local church.

To have a hierarchical polity means that pastors are employed and directed by a central authority. Through the pastors, the central authority, which owns all properties, guides the planning, schedule, strategies, style, etc., for each congregation. Such churches tend to have multiple missions and pay little attention to evangelism.

Thesis #1: *The Unification Church grew when and where it had an evangelical mission and congregational polity*

Founding of the church: The Unification Church grew from one spirit-led man starting a local congregation. The church had an evangelical mission and congregational polity. He taught and preached a God-centered biblical vision for world transformation. He prayed incessantly. His mission began with a vision of Jesus; people who joined testified that it was the spirit world that led them to him. He loved and served others to bring them into his church, sleeping and eating little, giving up his family, worrying not about physical needs. That was how it started.

In the early church, as described in Reverend Sun Myung Moon’s autobiography and numerous testimonies, witnessing was the only concern. In his words:

Before [1966], I had prohibited members from carrying out economic activities, in other words, from earning money. Because of this, we went about finding people even if it meant going through suffering by selling off everything we had; we did not engage in money-making

campaigns... I prohibited all financial activities save those involving manual labor where you shed your blood or sweat. Anything where you did not shed blood or sweat, I prohibited. The blood or sweat was like the payment of a price.

(from “True Father’s Life Story: The Business of Restoration,” *Today’s World*, September 2011)

Rev. Moon’s initial church in Pyongyang, from 1946-48, grew rapidly enough in two years to incur hostility from established Christian leaders. After the Korean War, the Unification Church grew from two members in 1951 to 400 members in 1956, a growth rate in the range of 175% per year. He reports having 120 churches in Korea four years later, which indicates that this phenomenal growth rate continued.

Mission field: How did it continue? Rev. Moon sent out disciples to replicate his process. They followed the evangelical mission and congregational polity in the mission field, where missionaries had to rely on God and had latitude for the way they organized. They had only one mission, it was evangelical, and they had the freedom to figure out how to succeed. Thus, the church in its early stage, whether in Korea or on the frontiers of the global mission field, was evangelical. It is worth pointing out that this type of church attracts young people.

America: In America, the church grew from three missionaries in 1959 to 300 full-time church workers in 1971. That is a growth rate of over 150% per year. Over the next five years the national growth rate was distorted by the importation of 200-300 missionaries from overseas, but we can isolate many localities that were not affected by this. In Durham, New Hampshire, where I was located, a group of seven grew to 21 full-time members and another 19 home-members in the summer of 1973. Others in that period relate similar growth in their locations. The Oakland, California, center, where I joined, had a fervent evangelical mission and hard-fought congregational polity. A group of three grew to about 70 between 1971 and 1973 — an annual growth rate of about 500%.

Europe: The church in Europe grew at a similar rate, 1965-73. Rev. Moon dispatched six missionaries to as many countries in 1965 — England, Germany, Austria, Italy, France, and Holland. By the end of 1972, Austria had about 100 members. The others were likely on a par with that, as each of the six countries sent 20 missionaries to the U.S. in early 1973. Based on this account, the church in these six countries grew at a rate of approximately 80% per year.

Russia: The mission in Russia was the same in the 1990s and early 2000s. The church in St. Petersburg grew from a handful of missionaries in 1991 to a peak of 300-400 attending Sunday service in 1993. The mission was only witnessing; they were only inviting people to and teaching workshops in the Divine Principle. By 2002, they had 1,000 members—a growth rate of almost 80%.

Global result: The church maintained evangelical fervor and congregational polity in its mission field until the early 1990s. The overall growth pattern of the Unification Church during this period globally was astounding.

Thesis #2: *The Unification Church with diverse missions and hierarchical polity did not grow*

As the Unification Church settled its global ministry, Rev. Moon established a centralized authority with multiple and diverse missions.

Mission diversification: The Unificationist mission expanded from evangelism to business, the arts, media, secular or interfaith education, member-revival and interfaith. Unification ecumenism began in the 1960s in Korea and mid-1970s in the U.S. The outreach to scholars and scientists began at the same time. UTS launched in 1975. Newspapers started in 1975 in Japan, 1976 in the U.S. and then other countries over the next 15 years. Businesses such as machine tool production, ginseng sales, shipbuilding, fishing and restaurants, construction companies, hotels, printing, and many more started in the late 1960s in Korea and multiplied globally beginning in the 1970s. This drained large numbers of full-time church workers from the mission field.

Ocean Church exemplifies the impact of this on evangelism. Its mission combined evangelism with fishing. The evangelical aspect was that thousands of young Americans would find God and a healthy lifestyle through the ocean. But the members’ energy went into the externals of their mission, and we generated oceanic enterprises and adventure training, but no evangelism.

Hierarchical polity: Rev. Moon established a parish system in the United States. He installed regional directors in Japan and the United States, and national leaders and continental directors globally. In the late 1990s he imported into each nation four “national messiahs,” one of which had effective governing authority, and in 2006 another authority in many nations representing him directly (the *boon bong wang*). Local congregations experienced a revolving door of leaders employed by headquarters.

The United States: Growth in the United States continued where good evangelical practices persisted

into the late 1980s in the San Francisco area and through the 1990s and into the 2000s in New York and Chicago. The most persistent growth sector at present is the Latino community, whose leaders are motivated strongly by evangelism and, due to the language barrier, effectively congregational in polity. Otherwise, membership numbers plateaued at 2,000 to 2,500 families.

Russia: After the growth in St. Petersburg, the trend turned negative and by 2010 there were less than 200 attending, and in 2011, less still. The 1,000 members in 2002 became 800 by 2012. A Russian member I interviewed cited a court case against the church as a cause, both for public image damage and forcing leading missionaries out of the country. American missionaries add that the church failed to prepare indigenous leaders and turn ownership over to them.



Rev. and Mrs. Moon officiated at the Holy Wedding of 30,000 Couples at Seoul's Olympic Stadium on August 25, 1992.

Korea: Membership in Korea peaked at 16,000 and then declined to 14,000 by 2009. In July 2012, the headquarters reported that membership had grown from 30,000 to 46,000 within the last one to two years. One would expect that the global church would have been awash with testimonies of this, but there were none such. My conclusion is this growth, while due the utmost respect, came not from fresh conversions, but from improved care for existing and lapsed members, more attention to recordkeeping, and interest in a new generation of leaders.

Global result: Rev. Moon never curtailed the evangelical mission, but because economic, social-cultural, revival and interfaith activities are less demanding spiritually, evangelism generally disappeared. In addition, removing ownership from local hands eventually resulted in the abdication of local responsibility. At that point, the church stopped growing.

A call for a hybrid of the two models

The True Parents' global mission required a base of believers, and to generate this they led a church with an evangelical mission and congregational polity. It also required global impact upon all aspects of life, hence, vertical organization and mission diversification, even at the sacrifice of church growth. In the process, they created two distinct models and depended on members to do both. After an 18-hour day putting out a newspaper, we were to head to a neighborhood and raise spiritual children. In short, we were to be "small Sun Myung Moons." Few could endure the suffering that he endured in pursuit of the ideal.

The mission remains, and we need to engraft our two models. I propose we study spiritual movements that have successfully combined vertical and horizontal dynamics, such as the Latter Day Saints, Jehovah's Witnesses and Roman Catholicism. I would foresee a hybrid to capture the strength of each model. The value of the congregational, evangelical model is spirit and action, the vitality elements. The value of the hierarchical, multiple model is vision and breadth, the life elements. Following that principle (see *Exposition of the Divine Principle*, pp. 48-49), the hierarchical, multiple model — the vertical — is like the sun and air, giving love without cost universally. The congregational, evangelical model — the

horizontal — is like food and water, grown and managed by labor. Another use of the model is that an evangelical mission is the vertical dynamic, like the whole purpose, and congregational polity is the horizontal dynamic, like the self-purpose, and these are fused in the ministry of the Holy Marriage Blessing.

To implement this, we would dedicate our hierarchical structure solely to the success of the local evangelical mission, centering on marriage Blessing ministry, and delegate non-evangelical missions to freestanding businesses or para-church organizations. We would universalize the Holy Marriage Blessing and develop a process to empower people of our faith community and any faith community to bestow it, thereby preparing for the future.

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Dr. Tyler Hendricks (UTS Class of 1978) served as president of the Unification Church of America and of Unification Theological Seminary. He presently teaches online classes for the HSA-UTS certificate program, directs the online Center for Education at UTS, and conducts the weekly Holy Marriage Blessing radio ministry, which can be heard live at WKNY1490.com, Sundays at 7 am New York time.

Photo at top: *Reverend Moon speaks outdoors in Korea in 1960.*