

My experiences since my eighteen-year-old daughter joined STF/ATF in August

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Dear Family,

I would like to share with you some of my experiences since my eighteen year old daughter joined STF/ATF in August. She had already registered at our local 2-year college, with a special interest in music studies. Our regional leader, Rev. Byeng Chul Kim had begun to put pressure on the few high school grads who had not expressed a desire to join STF right after graduation. Also, my spiritual son's daughter, a 2nd year STF member, had called her and, I assume, strongly urged her to go. When they hung up, she was in tears and confused. I continued to tell her that she had to come to her own decision and not do it because of outside pressure or guilt.

After the 2nd generation summer camp and DP workshop in Santa Barbara, California, My daughter made a decision to join STF. When I asked her what changed her mind, she said that through the DP lectures she began to understand God's suffering heart and she wanted to do something to help. We supported her decision and were proud of her. So from then we began to prepare. She signed up for ATF, which means that they work out of a center, rather than on mobile teams. She did this so that there would be an opportunity for her to keep up with her music (she plays alto saxophone). At first it is very difficult and painful for parents to accept that their child is leaving home. However, it was not an entirely new experience for us, as we had placed her in a church nursery (during weekdays) for one year when she turned 4 months old. For me, that was the most difficult thing I had ever done.

My daughter has been instrumental (pardon the pun) in the last couple of years in reconnecting our family to the church. In 1995 we purchased a home fifty miles from church and since we were so exhausted from our daily commutes to work, we began attending church less and less. And, to be honest, I guess we started questioning and struggling with many things. During this time, our first son was also going through a little "internet crisis" and we began to realize that we had not really done much to strengthen our children's faith or understanding of the Divine Principle, and how it relates to them in their daily lives. Oh, we went to church summer camps and special events, but never really connected with our children during their challenging teenage years. I guess we thought that since we were working hard and providing for their needs that they somehow would just get it through osmosis. Well it doesn't happen that way. There is a battle over our children's eternal lives and we must do everything in our power to help them establish their own foundations of faith and substance in order to receive the Messiah. It isn't automatic. During the time our son was struggling my daughter came to me in tears as she was trying to figure out her own understanding of God. Also, she was so worried about her brother. She missed relating with her church friends, too. It was a wake up call. We had to repent and we began to go to church regularly and reconnect them to the 2nd generation activities.

What has STF done for our family? Since my daughter left (she is in East Hyattsville, Maryland) we have begun to pray together as a family every night, especially for True Parents, Hyun Jin Nim, and the 2nd generation. When she was at home my children had the usual arguments and personality conflicts that many parents endure. The night she left, my elder son was sobbing and feeling very painful about his lack of heartistic unity with his elder sister. Unfortunately, it took her leaving for him to realize this. Now when she calls every Sunday, our children are so happy to talk and share with one another. We put on the speaker phone and all listen together. Although I have seen her at the August and October STF workshops, my husband and two sons have not seen her since July. They really miss her and respect and appreciate what she is doing.

When you send your child out to the front line, it causes you to re-examine your own life of faith and do your best to align yourself with Heavenly Father's direction. In my job as an elementary school teacher there are many opportunities to apply God's principles to guide my students. As a way of connecting to her fundraising efforts, I organized a school fundraiser for the 9-11 victims' families. We raised \$589.52 for the Families of Freedom Scholarship Fund. In this way I could feel that I was somehow connecting my fundraising experience with what the 2nd generation is doing.

Another area in which I have been sorely lacking is witnessing. From the beginning I struggled, but managed to bring 4 or 5 spiritual children. I was never good with after care, so that now only one spiritual child remains in the church. At the STF workshop in Colorado last week, my spiritual son, was there with Jerry to give safety awareness training. He told the group that October was his spiritual birth month and introduced me as his spiritual mother. I felt humbled, proud, and ashamed at the same time. It had been thirty long years since I witnessed to Jack while on One World Crusade. It wasn't so much what I did to bring Jack in. It was the fact that I put myself in a position for God to work and asked for His assistance, and He was there. October 14th is also our 20th wedding anniversary. I began to feel the need for repentance - for so many years of not feeling God's heart to restore His lost children. So many wasted years! Also, for so many years of not really growing in my marriage or returning joy to Heavenly Father, or creating a really happy home life in which our children could thrive. In spite of our shortcomings, Heavenly Father seems to have had a direct hand in the raising of our children. I was thinking about all these things and how I wanted to restart.

Since I am on vacation this month, I decided to take the train to Colorado - it's something I've always wanted to do. As I left Colorado to return home I prayed that Heavenly Father could prepare someone for me to witness to on the train, and that I could have the courage to witness. I felt that whatever we are asking our children to do, we must also be able and willing to do. In this way we can feel a deeper connection to them and work alongside of them even when we are apart. When I got on the train in Denver I noticed a young man and felt compelled to sit in the seat behind him. Two hours and forty minutes out of Denver I got up the courage to speak to him during a short rest stop in Fraser-Winter Park. I kept reading the workshop manual and praying for inspiration. Gradually we began to talk about our families and our beliefs. I could really feel that Heavenly Father had wanted to speak to him for so long. His name is "DB". He is 37 years old, divorced, with a 7 year old adopted son (who lives with his German mother, who happens to be an atheist). "DB" spends time each week with his son and volunteers at his school. "DB" was raised Catholic and he believes in God and understands how Satan works in this world - especially through television and the movies. He is aware how much of the world is controlled by Satan, and that people don't even know that they are under his control. "DB" operates his parents' 10,000 acre cattle ranch in Dodson, Montana. I had a whole day to witness to him, off and on, and I pray that I can find a way to bring him all the way back to Heavenly Father. Before I reached Martinez I read some of Father's words to him and we exchanged addresses. He said we could come up and visit him. He helped me carry my suitcase off the train and I introduced him to my husband Henry. I'm going to send him some things right away and pray for him like I never prayed before.

I believe that God doesn't want to throw away the first generation, but that He wants us to enter Canaan side by side with the 2nd generation (not to mention the whole world). In fact, I don't think the 2nd generation will be able to succeed without the 1st generation. STF and CARP are helping to save our children's spiritual lives! They are so understaffed. Most of them have families too, and they are sacrificing so much. Let's work together - 1st and 2nd generations - to fulfill God's desire and to bring about the "Breakthrough in 2003" that Hyun Jin Nim is so desperate to accomplish. Thank you all for your many years of hard work and sacrifice. Let's utilize the internet to support and inspire one another to continue and accomplish the work we began so long ago. If you have questions about sending your child to STF or ATF and would like a parent's point of view, please contact me. I welcome your thoughts and comments.