

Moon followers draw 80 to event at West Chester, PA YMCA

Marc Lee

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A car drives through West Chester, Pennsylvania promoting the Unification Church event Dec. 23, 1977

Members of the Unification Church met picketers, persons handing out adverse literature, skeptics and the curious last night at the YMCA in West Chester.

In the end, officials of the controversial Rev. Sun Myung Moon's church felt they had a productive evening. The beliefs and teachings of Moon were introduced to more than 80 citizens of West Chester.

Members of the local clergy, a cult deprogrammer, a representative of the American Civil Liberties Union, Unification Church members, YMCA staff, many members of borough council, mayor-elect Tom Chambers, interested residents and five West Chester policemen turned out for the hour long talk by Marc Lee, director of the Unification Church in Pennsylvania.

Before the meeting started, members of the church were afraid some persons might try to disrupt Lee's talk. Earlier this month, a church meeting in Valley Forge was disrupted by a number of pickets and a former member of the church.

After Lee's speech, a small disturbance took place when Lee D. Kellett, a deprogrammer tried to open a public question and answer period with Lee. Church member Jim Comey earlier said questions could be asked of individual members of the church but a public answering session wouldn't be held.

At the same time, Andrew Aharonian jumped up and said, "The Holy Bible is the only true word. Rev. Moon is a father of the devil. He is a thief and a robber."

In a short time, the persons wanting to continue discussion or arguments broke off with members of the church. Lee was cornered for a long period answering questions from a number of persons in the audience.

The only other problem came when a person who was later arrested for public drunkenness tried to crash the meeting. West Chester police Det. Tom Yarnell said the man wouldn't leave when asked and resisted arrest. "If he would have got upstairs (to the meeting) there would have been trouble," Yarnell said.

A confrontation with police and members of the church almost took place yesterday afternoon. Church members had been using a sound system on Wednesday and yesterday to advertise last night's meeting.

Church member Johann Kienberger said the police ordered him to stop using the system. Police Chief John Green said he had been receiving complaints about sound level and since the system was in use for a day, the church members would have to stop.



Two picketers turned out last night to protest a meeting by members of the Unification Church at the YMCA in West Chester. Patrick and Margaret Corcoran of West Chester said this is the first time they have protested a meeting by followers of the Rev. Sun Myung Moon. About 80 area resident were on hand to hear the church's message. Area clergymen also protested against the church by handing out pamphlets

Kienberger said the borough had no laws prohibiting the use of the sound system and he was going to defy the chief's order. Before a confrontation took place, Green relented and allowed the church members to continue until 5:30 p.m.

Before entering the Y last night, persons had to go past two picketers, Patrick and Margaret Corcoran of Walnut street, West Chester.

"Our kids are being ripped off" and "Moon talks to Jesus and we lose our children" were the signs being carried by the couple.

Patrick Corcoran said this is the first time they have picketed a meeting. He said he just had a daughter come out of another cult, The Divine Light Mission of Guru Maharaji Ji.

He said "peer pressure" was the cause of kids going into cults, Corcoran said he would stay until midnight, despite the cold, if he had to do it. "If Moon wants my son, he will have to fight me for him," Corcoran said.

Next to picketers, a group associated with local clergy were passing out literature denouncing

the church's claims to Christianity.

A number of the clergy have signed a letter giving their stance against the Unification Church. A copy of the letter appears on page four of today's paper.

Chambers said he was there because "it's a happening and a mayor ought to be here," Chambers was joined by a number of borough council. One person quipped, "The borough council doesn't draw this kind of crowd."

Come started the meeting by giving a brief history of Moon before introducing Lee, who has worked as an assistant to the South Korean born Moon, 57.

Lee recounted some of his experiences during the seven years he has belonged and plunged into the reasons Moon came to America and what the church's goals are.

Lee claims God called Moon to America to start a spiritual revival. He spent some time pointing out America is in sad shape because of immorality, suicide, the breakdown of the family unit, drugs and crime.

"The reason Moon is in America is to raise a group of young leaders to take charge to put their lives on the line for what they believe."

Lee said his talk wasn't meant to be of gloom but hope and Moon's message is of hope. Lee claims in the future the church will do things that now seem impossible. Changes in America will take place through new leaders, according to Lee.

Lee talked about other religious suffering persecution. he also talked about the life of Jesus.

At the beginning of the talk, Lee said he had a feeling West Chester is a "real community" and people are taking an interest in the community. He said he didn't receive a warm reception, but did't expect one.

After the meeting, Jackie Ashworth, director of public affairs for the church, also said people from the community were concerned. She said she was pleased with the turnout and was glad the church members had a chance to present the church's views.

Ash worth said some persons were afraid the church was going to pull people off the corner to join the church. Untrue, "we didn't expect and concerts," she said.