

Creating the Unification Church of Mexico - My First Steps

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Joy Pople was the first American missionary assigned to Mexico in 1975, and this is a testimony she wrote during the early days of the world mission work. Later, Joy worked in the World Mission Headquarters and became the first editor of the Today's World monthly magazine.

By nature, I am somewhat careless of details. One day I was alone, the other missionaries and members having left town. When I went out to buy bread, I locked the keys to the center inside. I was expecting a student to come, whom I had witnessed to the previous day, and thus remained seated at the door, wondering how Heavenly Father and I were going to resolve this predicament. Amazingly enough, the student showed up -- and on time, at that! In a glance, he took in the situation and borrowed a rope from the concierge and went up to the roof. I held the rope, and he lowered himself through the window. "What a story he

will have to tell of how he came to hear the Principle," I thought, "...if he understands and stays." Well, he understood some and stayed a little.

People came and went in those days, although some of the comings and some of the goings were a bit odd. Witnessing downtown, in the park and on the campus, I could bring many more people to lectures than I ever had in the United States, but none I met that way could deeply understand the meaning of our mission.

One day, in desperation, I ran blindly out of the center, not knowing where to go, but promising to search until I found someone God would indicate to me. I got on the first bus that passed, and at the end of the line found myself in a totally strange area of town. Walking straight ahead a few blocks, I noticed an evangelical bookstore and went in. Out of the corner of my eye, I saw a man who seemed to have light surrounding him. I dashed after him, and we sat in his car for quite a while, talking. He was a Baptist evangelist, and did not know quite what to make of me. I served in a church of a colleague of his for a while, and later he invited me to accompany him and his family on an evangelical visit to southern part of the country. Never having been known to turn down an invitation to travel, I accepted!

Disillusioned by so many apparently sincere people from this nation, I always searched for situations that would bring out the real character of my contacts. I found that taking a trip together met the requirements. We set out, seven adults, four children, and a puppy, in a medium-sized car. It was hot and humid. Only the evangelist and I knew how to drive. We visited various villages and ranches, most of them poor. I brought a guitar, at his request, for I had taught myself to play (badly) when I discovered its magical attraction for young people. As we would walk into a small church for service or a home for Bible study, he would sometimes turn to me and say, "It's your turn to lead." I longed to give the people the precious truth of the Principle, but sometimes, as I looked at the faces gathered before me in the lamplight, I would wonder if they had ever heard of God before. Sometimes I would try to paint a portrait of God with words -- as our loving Father. Most of the people had never seen a foreigner before and probably could not understand my Gringo accent. I wanted to embrace them and communicate in some way.

I especially wanted to teach the evangelist, but he was caught up in the woes of the impending breakdown of his marriage. Our last stop was his mother's house -- poorer by far than any other we visited. His mother and two older sisters had numerous small children, without any apparent husband or father figure. The family's seemingly fertile lands remained untended, and the house had no furniture except for nets strung between posts for sleeping. Not knowing what else to do to help them, I spent many hours each day making and cooking tortillas for the clan. Even in such poverty, they demanded perfectly-prepared tortillas, ones that split into three layers when cooked. Using only the palm of my hand and a piece of waxed paper, I would try to get them of uniform thickness and perfect roundness. Seemingly dozens of children and small animals kept vigil over my work.

On Sunday, as a celebration, they killed a scrawny chicken and cut it up into eighteen pieces, so each could have a bite. The chicken was hard to swallow, as I remembered how many times I had blithely eaten a quarter of a fat chicken all by myself. Here, the normally pale and listless children gobbled the rare bits of animal protein. Lacking food and drinkable water, I found mangoes, which were just beginning to come into season, very attractive. They remain my favorite fruit, although I suffered horrible indigestion after eating some thirty of them that week.

Finally, it was time to end our visit and return to the cool highlands. The evangelist was worn out, so I drove most of the return trip, inventing eye exercises in order to be able to concentrate and keep the car on the road. At one point, the two-lane highway climbs a long series of switchbacks, along the foothills of the highest mountain in the country. Always shrouded in mists, this peak had never been visible during my previous trips in that area. Now, around midnight, as we approached the central highland, the summit suddenly emerged out of the fog, its eternal snows illuminated by a full moon. Everyone else being asleep, I pulled off the road and got out to pray and sing.

I realized that Heavenly Father, too, often remains shrouded from our view, lying beyond our reach. But, I felt, if we can persevere in our tasks in the lowlands, we may be able to climb the highlands on occasion and catch a glimpse of Him—and maybe even reach out and embrace Him. One lady who had given us a chair when we were looking for broken-down furniture remained a friend and introduced me to a neighbor who was involved in the Catholic charismatic movement.



Joy Pople (left) in Mexico with German missionary Sylvia Dick, Korean visitors and one of the first members

When one of our home members had a dream of a major earthquake hitting the capitol city within a couple of weeks, I went to visit this lady. There I met a Jesuit priest, the only priest out of many who listened to my story and agreed with me that it might be a warning from God to repent and work for the salvation of our nation. In our city, we stockpiled food and water supplies and gathered forty people to pray at holy ground on the appointed day. We thought a small tremor would have been appropriate, but fortunately for our country, nothing shook.

Our relationship with that priest continued, and eventually I helped him work to fulfill one of his dreams -- gathering young and old people together for prayer in the neighborhood where he was working. He introduced me to one dedicated Christian family there, and we made plans. A volunteer school was available for our use.

The first week a dozen people came. I led the singing, Bible reading and explanation, and prayer. The next week, attendance doubled. Each week, more came. I would go from house to house inviting people, sometimes alone and sometimes accompanied by another woman. I would also visit the homes of those who attended the prayer meetings. Deep relationships developed with some of the families. I discovered, for instance, that if I cooked dinner for the family, the mother would really respond to me. Although I had tried home church type work before, in this neighborhood, I began to really feel the spirit of home church and could have a parental heart to all the people.

I had organized one-day programs at our center to begin to teach the Principle to them, and already some of them were taking up part of my mission. However, it was at this point that a year-long period of near physical exhaustion culminated in hepatitis, and I had to stay in bed. Later, I went back to America and was replaced by another missionary. I had thought that I had to work hard from morning until night, in order to fulfill my responsibilities in my assigned nation. However, confined to bed, I remembered that it is really Heavenly Father who is doing the work. Maybe we get in His way sometimes, and He has to press us down in order that He can be free to work.

In my assigned nation, I found that being a spiritual parent requires much more than teaching the Principle and guiding members through their spiritual ups and downs until they become strong family members. It meant helping them with their homework, visiting their relatives, going to their homes and cooking meals for their family, teaching them how to buy and prepare nourishing food, showing them how to use the city bus system, massaging sprained limbs, and much more.

I began to really feel like a parent in a way I never had before, and felt a deeper response from the people than I had experienced in the United States. We had to be ready to lay our lives and missions on the line for our members. In one case, when a sister's parents threatened to turn us in to the immigration authorities, we dug in for battle. For a student who left, I stayed up three nights crying and praying and could begin to feel a bit of how Heavenly Father must feel toward us when we turn our backs on Him.

When I left my nation in order to recover my health, the mother of one of the members came to the airport to see me off. With many tears, she asked if something would ever happen to her, would I take responsibility for all her children. How could I say no?