

Raising 5 Children in the Unification Church

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After being in the church for nearly ten years, my wife and I decided that it was the right time to begin our family. We had both just graduated from the Seminary and had begun to work in New Mexico and Wyoming which were part of the Denver Region of our church. Probably the greatest challenge that we would face in raising our children was that our church, founded by Rev Moon and led by Korean elders in America was uniquely an oriental Church, with Oriental traditions and mores. When our son was 10 months old we moved to Chicago to be near my parents. Because of Chicago's many businesses, 85% of the Chicago community consisted of families that were made up of at least one Japanese

member.

My wife and I had little trouble with many of the Oriental customs, but this would not prove true for our children. As an American and a European we would be considered a "western" family. This meant that we had a very different ideology about receiving directions from our elders. Whereas a Japanese member would usually respond to a direction with the phrase "hai!" (meaning yes!) Americans would usually question that same direction with the word "why?"

I would say that until our children started high school there were few problems. Our best friends consisted of an American husband and a Japanese wife. And to this very day their 5 children are like kissing cousins with our five. At one especially difficult financial time, our economic emergency plan consisted of the idea of all 14 of us living in one house while we rented out the other. Happily, this emergency plan never had to be enacted, although it came awfully close on a number of occasions. All of our children had Japanese friends and my wife's best friend was the wife of a Japanese brother whose son was best friends with our son.

Since our two families were really on the "front line" our children attended every providential event that our church was involved in. The ten children attended every church camp, every workshop and every national level event— whether it was in New York, Washington, D.C. or Chicago. Every time Rev Moon came to Chicago, we woke up the children at 3:30am and drove downtown to his hotel, so we could all participate in his morning church service.

January 1st was called "God's Day" in our church and so every New Year's eve, we stayed home, made lists of what we were grateful for, what we were repentful for and what our goals were for the new year. Then at midnight, we all welcomed in the New Year with prayer. A few hours later at 5:30am we woke up the children, dressed them and drove in what was usually freezing cold weather to our church center an hour away. Here we welcomed in the New Year with a 7am pledge service, followed by our regular service at 11:00am.

As our children each turned twelve, we sent them to study for a year in Korea. This proved to be a great experience for each of them. There was also a 40 day workshop in our church retreat center in Korea and some of our children and many of their friends as well as my wife and I participated in this experience.

The first rumbling of discord came when the children began high school. For the first time, their basic batch of friends came from the local high school kids rather than their church friends. One son stopped hanging out with his "best friend" because, like so many children who had Japanese fathers, he was basically non-verbal. Since our children were too young to drive, they could not "hang out" with their church friends and thus they gravitated into relationships with their high school classmates.

I thank God for sports. I truly believe that by participating in sports our children were protected from many of the potential evils of high school life. Our children were all athletes—the boys all played football and the girls both ran cross country. One conference rule stated that if you were caught at a party where alcohol was being served you would be suspended for 2 games. My children knew this and I believe that because they worked too hard in the weight room they were not about to risk being suspended. Every week they would play teams that had suspended players and in fact my son's best friend, the starting quarterback permanently lost his job because of his suspension. One time someone offered to sell my son some steroids and he nearly pushed him through a wall. Thus, drugs and alcohol were not a temptation for my children. The football coach even prayed with the team after each game and

stated that if someone wanted to fire him, "let them try". I believe that sports really helped mold my children and taught them many lessons in life. Lessons that they would continue learning as athletes in college and in sports related careers after they graduated.

But high school years also saw my children spending less and less time in church activities. Their camp participation dwindled, their sports schedule prevented them from participating in many after school church activities and their Sunday Service attendance dropped dramatically. By his senior year my oldest son basically stopped attending church, because he no longer had any friends in church. And it seems that each succeeding child dropped out of church a year earlier, so that our fifth rarely attended church once she got to high school. Of the five, only our oldest daughter would continue to go to church at least semi-regularly once she entered college.

The one bright spot for me (not necessarily for them) were our weekly family meetings. These usually consisted of dad pulling out the white board and giving a lecture on some aspect of the bible or Divine principle. Although in my opinion, these were brilliant lectures, I must admit that for the children, they were a "bit too long," with little time for the children's comments, questions or answers.

Probably the stickiest point was our philosophy about dating and marriage. In our church, Rev Moon traditionally engaged couples to be married. My wife and I were introduced this way and thirty two years later, we have a beautiful family to show for it. But my wife and I each chose to join this movement and had absolute faith in the leadership and advice of Rev Moon. Our children, on the other hand were "born into the movement" and need to make their own commitment beyond their inheritance of their parents' faith. As a general rule, families with at least one Oriental spouse were much more willing to participate in this process than strictly "western" couples. In fact one western wife was determined to match her children to oriental spouses so that their children would better fit into our movement.

Because our children were athletes, they went straight to college and therefore did not participate in the two year church program immediately after high school. Our children all knew that their parents deepest desire was that they remain virgins until their wedding night and that they would be willing to be engaged by Rev. Moon or at least choose a church member as their spouse.

Today our children range in age from 28 to 22. None of them are married, nor have they chosen to be engaged by Rev Moon. Although several of their boyhood friends have been married by Rev Moon, this has not influenced them in any positive way.

In conclusion, I realize that we are members of a church that was begun in Korea, has an overwhelming ratio of Japanese members to American members and is immersed in oriental traditions. All these factors have made it difficult for our children. Our children learned many wonderful things when they went to Korea and I believe that while our children have witnessed the breakdown of many of their best friends' families, they know that the commitment that parents who were engaged and married by Rev and Mrs. Moon is on a far greater scale. As difficult as it may have been for our western children to grow up in an oriental Church, I believe that the seeds that we have sown in our own five children are all bearing great fruit.