

## How I Joined the Unification Church

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*Barbara Grabner who joined our church in February 1976, now lives with her husband Milos Klas (6,000-couple blessing group) and their son in Slovakia. Mrs. Grabner is the author of Mission Butterfly based on testimonies from missionaries, which she began collecting in 1995.*



*Barbara Grabner with guests who came to listen to her lecture in the local museum in her hometown in July 2015*

I grew up in a village south of the picturesque town of Salzburg, birthplace of the world-famous composer W. A. Mozart. If you have seen the movie "Sound of Music," you have seen the environment in which I spent my childhood. I climbed many of the mountains depicted in the movie during my youth. Our village priest, who presided over the wedding of the Trapps, encouraged us to watch the movie when it came to our local cinema. I was ten years old at that time, but I did not see the movie until after I became a Unification Church member in 1976.

I was born on December 17, 1955, two months after Austria became free of occupation by the Allied troops resulting from World War II. Germany had annexed Austria in March 1938 and initially Austria shared Germany's punishment after her defeat in 1945.

From 1955 onward, the Austrian nation experienced a remarkable rebirth. Most Austrian members were born within the decade or so that followed, which happened to be the time when Korean Christians mercilessly persecuted True Father. Perhaps God tried to secure the providence by creating future followers in Europe?

I think my parents were destined to meet for a higher purpose; both were believers as well as intelligent and hard-working people. Yet those in my father's clan were too softhearted, while those in my mother's clan were intolerant of those outside their own religion. Neither side alone would have provided the fabric for a pioneer of the new age.

Both my parents attended Sunday service and visited the church for additional devotions. My mother and her father had spiritual encounters with people who had died. Grandfather had an incredible encounter right after World War I. One evening he went outside the farmhouse and looked at the surrounding mountain ranges. Apparently, he then received a revelation. He went inside and told his family, "Now Christ will come again!" His statement left them puzzled. My mother never understood her father's proclamation, and she rejected Rev. Moon until the end of her life.

## Spiritual awakening

I had my first religious experience around the age of four or five. Suddenly I noticed the crucifix in the corner of our kitchen. I asked my father what it was. He explained that the man hanging on the cross was a very good man -- God's son -- who helped others and healed many people. Alas, evil people tortured him and nailed him to the cross.

My father showed me where the nails had pierced Jesus' hands and feet. My young mind was so upset -- such an injustice! I begged my father to take the poor man down from the cross on the spot. My parents were unable to calm me down. Finally, they found a solution: We shall take him down next time we paint the kitchen, they said. I was satisfied, because I thought this would happen soon (in reality it took years). When I became older, I was still unable to perceive Jesus' death as having been destined by God despite Catholic Church explanations.



*Barbara with her husband Milos and son Laurenc during the Blessing of Ancestors in Poland in 2002*

## Immersed in scripture

As soon as I was able to read fluently, I started to study the Bible on my own. As an only child, I often felt lonely; books became my best friends. The stories of young Samuel, of the battles of David, and others deeply inspired me. I enjoyed reading the dramatic accounts in the Old Testament though some of the material proved impossible for me to understand. Reading the Bible was rather unusual for Catholics; believers relied instead on explanations by priests or on the Catechism.

At the age of nine or ten, I started to have special dreams. One night, I saw stars circling

on the roof of our house and mysterious fiery signs in the sky. I was excited, because I thought that the Last Days had arrived. I called my mother to look at these signs but she did not see anything. Her reaction disappointed me. In colorful dreams, I would move above the ground as if swimming. The most dramatic dream was of the Devil celebrating mass clothed like an altar boy. In the dream, as soon as I discovered the devil in disguise and told my mother and others about it, he turned around and chased me through the whole village. This race for my life ended in our parish church. Many years later, I understood the meaning -- that I should be watchful because Satan had invaded the church.



*Barbara's First Communion; her parents are in back*

My religious fervor intensified when I watched the movie "Quo Vadis," which depicts the persecution of Christians in ancient Rome. I started to read the book and wondered if I would be willing to die as those people had. To endure martyrdom became for me the ultimate test of faith. I imagined myself going through various kinds of torture, such as being roasted alive or facing lions. I always worried about my capacity to endure pain. In high school, I was exposed to various materialistic points of view, such as Marxism and Darwinism. How could I defend the faith and prove that God really exists and that the Bible was a superior teaching? I wanted so much to open the

mystical scroll sealed with seven seals. Our priest suggested I read theological literature but it did not satisfy me. Eventually, I was ready to change my denomination if some other faith could help me.

## First encounter

At the age of twenty, while working as a kindergarten teacher, my friend Brigitte introduced me to the Unification community in Salzburg. During the first lecture, I became so inspired about the explanation of the relationship between God and human beings that I felt as if the gates of heaven had opened. Finally, God had answered my prayers and questions! I was an impatient listener who wanted quick, logical answers. I gave the lecturers a hard time. After the fourth lecture I felt that either this was a pitfall or a new revelation. I asked, Who is the author of this teaching? Is he a prophet? Where does he live?

The lecturers told me, You will hear about him in the final lecture.

I exclaimed, Why later and not now? The center leader decided to take a short cut and drew the parallels

of history on the blackboard. I smiled broadly when reading the dates 1517– 1917. The leader was pleased with my response, and with a gentle smile, she gave me a picture. I was flabbergasted -- the picture showed an Asian family, casually dressed and sitting on a sofa. I thought, This man looks more like some Protestant minister -- not like a messiah.



*As a teenager, Barbara often went hiking through the mountains with her mother*

Fortunately, I remembered the problem of John the Baptist. Oh, well, let us give this man a chance, I told myself. I told the members I would continue to study the teachings. The next time I came, they led me to the study room and gave me a book written by Dr. Young-oon Kim, introducing the Divine Principle revelation. When I read the passage about the similarity of the time of Jesus' birth and the Second Coming, I started to smile about this "nonsense." In the next moment, I was stunned. I saw Jesus pass through the room, saying, "I am in this place!" Then he disappeared through the walls as he had entered. A wave of peace settled around me.

In the following days, when I knelt down to pray, asking if this was really the truth, ringing from all sides came, "Yes! Yes!" and God chastised me gently, "Why do you ask me again?"

This was my answer."

From that time on, I started to study with a calm mind and the assurance that God and Jesus had led me to this place. The following weeks I felt liberated -- my search for meaning had arrived at its final destination!

In 1976, the movement suffered severe persecution; bad rumors swept through my hometown.

I responded to the attacks with the words, I shall leave if I find out that this teaching is wrong. Despite my watchfulness, I became increasingly convinced over the years. It was not people who convinced me, but revelations given by Heaven. A few months later, I was lucky to participate in the campaign for the Washington Monument Rally and met my savior in person.