

One America of Interdependence, Co-Prosperity and Universal Shared Values

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Over the past eight years Mario Salinas, director of Universal Peace Federation-Honduras and Carol Pobanz of New Jersey, representing UPF-USA have collaborated in numerous cultural exchange projects between Latin America and North America. These are their reflections on the importance of unity of the Americas and the Caribbean.



At the recent African Summit, Dr. Hak Ja Han Moon, our True Mother, explained in her keynote speech that Christians were profoundly persecuted initially but later Christianity spread throughout Europe and that the center of civilization reached Great Britain. Britain developed but without a proper understanding of God, instead of living for others, it conquered others and took things away from its colonies. Even though the British were believers who began in the name of Christ, they failed to teach by example the essence of Jesus' message -- they failed to love their neighbors. In other words, they were unable to attend God as their parent and unable to love others as their brothers and sisters. Mother's speech that day, though, does not refer only to Britain's outreach in Africa. It might be said of any Christian nation or anyone of us who professes to be a Christian.

Carol Pobanz -- compelled to work in Latin America

Usually when people hear that I have been working in Central America, they ask me why. In order to answer that question, I need to go back a few years, to 1999. My oldest son was fourteen at the time and he wanted to go on a service project to Honduras with Religious Youth Service (RYS) UPF's youth service branch, but he was too young to attend the program. However, John Gehring, who was directing the project, said my son could attend if I (his parent) went with him. To sweeten the offer a bit more, he proposed that if I went along as a staff member, I could receive some compensation. So, I went on my first service project, and it was my first experience in a developing nation as well.



As I prepared, and as I pondered True Father's designation of the United States as "the eldest son nation," I thought about how I, as a representative of this nation, would go to "help" the poor people of Honduras, a "younger son nation." But let me correct this and more honestly describe that I planned to help the poor, (forgive me) ignorant people of Honduras. Clearly, here is the portrait of the "ugly American," professing

an attitude of some kind of national superiority.

When I arrived in Honduras, I learned that we would help to clean up after Hurricane Mitch. One of the norms or principles of these service projects is to work together with the community in mutual cooperation. They assigned me to work with a young Honduran boy, perhaps nine years old. He is nameless to me now but that little boy changed my life and perhaps my destiny. We were cleaning up trash together. Joyfully and enthusiastically, he was running with a very old, rickety wheelbarrow when suddenly the wheel fell off and it tipped uselessly to a halt. Great, I thought, now we need to go buy another wheelbarrow. Well, while I churned this dispirited thought through my mind, my young friend scanned the dirt and quickly found a piece of wire. He bent down, skillfully reattached the wheel and took off running again. Then arose the heart of my epiphany, in the form of a question: "Who is the ignorant one now?"

In that moment, my world changed. Through that experience, I realized that God has blessed every single one of his children with strengths, talents and intelligence and blessed us to be born somewhere on this planet -- some in the United States, others in Honduras, others in South America, Africa, Europe or Asia, with varying environmental, cultural or national situations. We all embody the same humanity, have a unique relationship with our parent God and are all faced with a variety of challenges in our lives.



My Challenge

My challenge, though not a physical one at all, was in realizing that I had no idea I had an attitude regarding people from Central America or South America or anywhere else in the world for that matter. I had no idea that I was an "ugly American." I thought the ugly American was just some clueless person walking around on vacation in shorts with a camera around her neck, someone totally oblivious to the culture. I thought that because I knew True Parents and I knew the Divine Principle and because I understood God's love for us as our parent, I was beyond any kind of prejudice. The fact of the matter is that even in the unification movement we are blind to our own shortcomings. Just because we sit together in the same church, believe the same thing and call ourselves brothers and sisters does not mean we love one another as brothers and sisters.

So back to the original question: Why am I working in Central America? I am working in Central America because I want to overcome my ignorance and understand who my brothers and sisters are, what their lives are like and share in their experiences. I want to take religion out of the book and make it my reality. This is my religious practice. Peace begins with me.

I want to understand God's will and then expand my understanding through my family relationships, through community caring and through national cooperation. **Mario -- giving back on behalf of my nation**

In my childhood, I often saw United States' volunteers, perhaps Christian missionaries or Peace Corps volunteers, coming to serve my nation. They were helping us most of the time, and we would stand by as mere observers. So, I idealized my future by thinking, "When I grow up, I want to serve other people like these people do and if possible, I want to go to their nations to return the favor."

I joined the Unification Church in Honduras, as a teenager, in 1977, as one of the first three members during the church's pioneer missionary period.



My story

In 1989, I had my first experience in international service projects with World Students Service Corps (WSSC) the service branch of the Collegiate Association for the Research of Principles (CARP) which was organizing a service project with young people from around the world to serve a Mayan community in Guatemala, a neighboring country of Honduras. A few years later, RYS called upon me to organize projects in Central America. I began doing this in 1995.

As national project director, I met Carol Pobanz (the coauthor of this article) and her son in 1999, during the fourth service project in the Central America region, which we arranged in response to the enormous restorative challenges in the aftermath of Hurricane Mitch in 1998.

After that project, Carol and I created a very strong bond of heart and have been working cooperatively ever since the initial Honduras Project so many years ago. Our experiences and our stories match perfectly inasmuch as they reflect the nurturing of our hearts through truly experiencing global familial ties.



As Carol mentioned, as a Honduran I represent a younger brother nation, and I always feel the importance of following the righteous example of my older brother nation, the United States. Carol and I have worked together undertaking several service initiatives from 1999 until 2013. But it was not until 2015 that I saw my dream as a young boy come true, not only by no longer being a mere observer, but by actually participating in an activity to give back to the United States. I must point out here that my nation is not financially blessed, and my offering to the United States was not of any actual monetary value, but I could experience my personal value as a national representative by sharing the uniqueness of my culture.

In 2015, embracing the philosophy of mutual cooperation, Carol and I were able to bring a group of young Honduran artists to the United States for a cultural exchange project in her hometown, the township of Nutley, New Jersey. The Honduran youth were able to share an expression of their culture by teaching the United States youth the artistic process of creating the Honduran sawdust carpet (en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sawdust_carpet). The carpet, which was twelve by twenty-four feet (3.66 by 7.32 meters) in size and communicated a desire for friendship between our nations, was the centerpiece of an all-Sunday Family Festival with participants from local churches, organizations, clubs and family groups. Also participating were some students from each of Nutley's elementary and high schools, as well as enthusiastic educational and political authorities, many of whom simulated the sawdust designs with chalk drawings on the pavement. It was a day of art, music, food and great fun. The event concluded with a Bridge of Peace ceremony connecting the Nutley mayor and me in brotherhood.

I can only express the importance of this experience by comparing it to dynamic family relationships. When a younger brother is grateful to an older brother for his care and love, the younger brother wants to express gratitude for that love. The younger one may not be able to reciprocate fully but he can perhaps make a card or write a thank-you note – something meaningful, yet lesser than the original gift. That's what the Nutley sawdust carpet became for us as Hondurans, a gift of gratitude.

In 2017, Honduran young people were able to share with another group of US young people, making of another sawdust carpet, only this time by invitation and with the cordial sponsorship of the permanent mission of Honduras at the United Nations under the direction of Ambassador Elizabeth Flores, who also hosted the event. In this case, young Hondurans and young Americans worked in cooperation to create a carpet at the United Nations Headquarters in New York City, this time as a combined gift to the global community, especially commemorating the seventy-second anniversary at the United Nations on the UN Plaza on October 23, 2017.



Perhaps an example of Jesus' recommended practice mentioned in Matthew 5:24, "first be reconciled to your brother[s] [and sisters] and then come and offer your gift." This second carpet, though only a symbolic gesture (which we also offered to our Heavenly Parent and True Parents) represented for us the unity between the United States and Latin America. It was a united offering of a providential younger brother with the older brother on a global level at the United Nations.

I recall that peace starts with me, by my overcoming my shortcomings and misconceptions about other people and learning to appreciate another's differences and strengths. Peace also builds upon meaningful relations. Peace expands as we share our successes and inspire others to follow our example. Though peace may sometimes seem to be a fanciful dream, when we hold fast to our vision of an interdependent and co-prosperous world, hold fast to our universal values of love and respect for each individual and culture and remain steadfast in our endeavor to fulfill those ideals, we are certain to realize our dreams. There is only one American family of brothers and sisters from the North, Central and South and the Caribbean. Let us make our dream become a reality!

Presently, Carol and I are continuing our work to inspire solidarity among young people by developing a Peace Park in Tela, Honduras. This three-year project, a peace park themed Only One America (*Parque de Paz -- Una Sola America*) is being built by young people from the Americas, including the Caribbean and is meant to be a substantial reflection of humanity's hope of all ages, a world of peace. We began building this park in January 2017 and continued in August 2017 as Phase 1, parts 1 and 2 respectively. The schedule calls for Phase 2 to take place from this August 10–22. We are inviting young people from the United States and all of Latin America to join in building this model of American brotherhood.

You can find more information or apply to participate in this project by clicking the green bar at www.peaceinproject.com and then following the link.