

Senior Church Members are the Roots of the Church

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Shibanuma Kunihiko with his family

Last March, Mother appointed me as a special touring evangelist in Japan. The transfer was so sudden that I wondered how I was chosen to take on the responsibility as a touring evangelist.

In making a church abundant with the spirit and truth that Mother speaks about, how can I, a lone senior member, contribute? Senior couples' families are like the roots of the church. If the roots are not alive, the entire church does not have life. I believe that the senior couples' families should take initiative and return to the origin of their faith.

In addition, that the second-generation members, who will carry the future, correctly understand God's tradition and pioneer the

future by absorbing the first-generation member's good points is extremely important for the entire unification movement. I also think that educating those in our second generation is a big assignment. I began touring with these thoughts in mind.

Out of sixteen districts in the Japanese church, I am in charge of five districts in western Japan, from Hyogo Prefecture to Okinawa Prefecture. Here I interact with other senior members and provide youth education and second-generation education.

I give lectures for new guests, counsel people privately and visit members. On this basis, once a tour plan is set up in each district, I will follow the district's requests and do a tour for seven to ten days.

On these tours, I usually give three two-hour lectures, one before lunch, one after lunch and one after dinner.

When I visit a family's home, I limit the visit to three hours -- two hours to listen to them and one hour for me to talk about church situations or True Parents. Sometimes I will drive more than two hours to the nearest church and hold an assembly or give a Divine Principle lecture at a home church for new guests. At times even a member of the city government has attended. For this reason, I sense a close relationship exists between these gatherings and society.

Mother said not to stop teaching the Divine Principle in churches, and I want to give lectures personally to new guests and blessed wives. Especially to the wives, I focus on speaking about how we can meet our Heavenly Parent and True Parents through living by the Principle.

Moreover, I am trying to visit as many bi-cultural families as I can. I have experienced the complications of living overseas, because I lived outside of Japan for thirty-two years.

From the perspective that Japan is the mother nation, I believe that Japan can receive grace and our Heavenly Parent can work if we lay a foundation by perceiving those who married into Japanese families from overseas as valuable and saying, "Thank you for coming." In that context, I have begun to grasp the situations of bicultural families and am interacting with them whether they are Korean- Japanese, Japanese-Filipino or Japanese- American. [The first term in these pairs refers to the husband's cultural roots.]

While I was on one of my tours, I had the opportunity to talk to young people about the Leda development project in Paraguay. The point that I emphasized to them was to be consistent in whatever it is they are doing.

By continuing to live for the sake of a society, society will revolve. True Parents' ideology is to give and forget. If we continue to give in any way toward society, even if we are not particularly out on the front lines, society will remain stable. Thus, what we are propelling in Leda will move the nation, and we have even had Paraguay's president come to visit us.

Putting True Father's teachings into practice moved even the president. Father never said that we should

take a comfortable path, but behind what he said there was always a plan.

With our common knowledge, we come to learn of Heavenly Parent's great wish by continuously moving forward and believing in things that we may not understand. I think that the Leda providence testifies to this.

With their society's common knowledge, they do not expect people to go to Leda after they are fifty. The local indigenous people's average lifespan is about forty years, so it shocked them to see our Japanese national messiahs, fifty or sixty years of age, sweating waterfalls as they worked with feeble bodies.

Father would say to the Japanese national messiahs, "Become top laborers. Become dark-skinned like the indigenous people." Hence, we did our best. About three months after we began the Leda project, Father came to visit us. The first thing he said when he got off the plane was, "You have become like the indigenous people!" It was such a good experience to see him so happy.

I hope young people go to Leda, because they would be able to experience the joy of being with True Parents. When you go to Leda the senior members are working hard to fulfill True Parents' wishes. Some young people may think that it is strange. They ask, Why are they working so hard at a place that people cannot survive?

The young people seem more shocked than the indigenous people were. Therefore, young people that go to Leda develop a deeper interest in Heavenly Parent and True Parents.

On the other hand, Father said, "Because you have not been able to establish the tradition of the unification movement in Japan, I am sending you to Leda to pay indemnity." From that point of view, because we were part of establishing the tradition of the unification movement, we launched the Association for the Sustainable Development of North America and South America, and for fifteen years, we have been dispatching second-generation members overseas. I believe that we have had great results up until now. Next August, we plan to send more young people for a three-week program.

Young people that participate in this, develop more interest in the world. Some of them chose to work at the UN or go to Africa or Oceania through the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA). Others feel strongly about educating those in our second-generation and decide on their own to take that path after their experience in Leda. A wide variety of paths is available for second-generation Unificationists. Some become ministers and others enter general society.

Our task is to discover how to plant deep roots of a life of faith within that environment.

Let's live with True Parents

We entered the church when we were young, met True Parents and Heavenly Parent and resolved to dedicate ourselves for the will. I believe that the basis for that resolution, to live on without change, is second-generation education. When I give lectures to young people, I tell them that I am nineteen years old. I joined the church when I was nineteen, and my thinking is the same now as it was then. The senior members' unchanging passion toward the will can greatly influence young people. This is because I believe that following our path is a means to live our lives with True Parents.

What young people need is to have experiences in which they can realize who Heavenly Parent and True Parents are. Not integrating the Principle into one's lifestyle is a big problem for those in our second generation.

Mother is sending young people out as missionaries around the world. These experiences are vital. When I do tours, many church leaders tell me that spiritually, those who worked overseas as missionaries have grown tremendously. When they go overseas, they often struggle for many reasons.

I think that having many experiences like that is good for young people. I have great hope because Mother has provided us a clear direction for education of second-generation members.

Though I received the mission as a special touring evangelist suddenly, I am grateful, more so because I love to meet our members than for any other reason. I have come to realize how much True Parents love our brothers and sisters. Mother understands the real situation of our members; thus, she created this touring system. I can still hear Mother's voice when she said, "Please take care of our members who are struggling."

In addition, while I follow the path that Mother desires me to take, I deeply feel in my heart that her message to "advance without ceasing," does not just mean that the unification movement should not stop but also that what True Father's wishes to be done must not be stopped. Moreover, I have also realized how deep Mother's affection toward Father is.

Mother wants to quickly accomplish North Korea–South Korea unification and to realize Cheon Il Guk, which are Father's wishes. Every time I am on a tour, I feel this and remember her saying, "That is why I have dispatched you as touring evangelists." I plan to continue to embrace Mother's heart and strive to bring in at least one more member as I tour as much as possible.