

University of Pennsylvania Alumni Respond to Insult in Daily Pennsylvanian

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The Daily Pennsylvanian, the school newspaper for University of Pennsylvania, used the picture above of the Lovin' Life Ministries church as their article's cover photo (photo credit Maegan Cadet).

Alumni of the University of Pennsylvania (Penn) and their allies are reacting in sorrow to an article titled "Some Religious organizations Near Campus Show 'Darker Side'" published April 5, 2012 in Penn's campus newspaper, the *Daily Pennsylvanian*. Penn student Glenn Shrum's article, which labeled the religious groups Good News Mission (GNM), Ananda Marga and Lovin' Life Ministries as "high-pressure groups," can be found below.

Crescentia DeGoede, a co-pastor of the Philadelphia Lovin' Life Ministries, said that Shrum, who had quoted her in his article, falsely portrayed the Unification Church.



Crescentia and Leighton DeGoede, Lovin' Life pastors in Philadelphia.

"First, I am insulted by Shrum's use of the term 'Moonie,' which is a derogatory term rather than an 'unofficial name for members of the Unification Church,' as he said in his article," said DeGoede. "All major media from *the New York Times* to Reuters have confirmed that its use indicates bigotry. If Shrum believes he has the liberty to use such a term, does he feel the *Daily Pennsylvanian* will allow writers such as Shrum to disrespect and publicly belittle all minority groups?"

"Second, I am saddened by the statement from Prof. Steven Dunning that members of religious groups may need some form of psychological 'de-programming.' Over the past thirty years, thousands of Unification Church members have suffered brutalities at the hands of 'de-programmers' who sought to break their faith through kidnapping, forced isolation and intimidation. Far too many Unificationists have

been physically, psychologically and even sexually abused by these de-programmers. However, countless victims – of which my mother was one – returned to the Unification Church and are now successful parents of children who have strong core values of purity, altruism and internal- and external excellence for the sake of world peace. Had their ‘de-programming’ process been successful, these children, of which I am one, would not exist today. Is that the desired outcome?

“Third, Shrum writes that according to Religious-Studies Prof. Dunning, ‘certain new religious movements use ‘high-pressure’ tactics to attract and keep their members.’ However, where is the evidence of the fact that Lovin’ Life Ministries uses ‘high-pressure tactics’? Has Shrum even attended Lovin’ Life’s service or interviewed someone who has?”

According to DeGoede, Shrum manipulated her trust and neglected to include “key elements” of their conversation in his article such as the fact that “we are proud of and upfront about our identity as a contemporary ministry of the Unification Church, and we clearly state this on all of our literature. Shrum also failed to mention that a core element of our ministry is interfaith cooperation because we are a movement for peace, which we believe requires people of all faiths to work together to achieve. In line with this, our services and programs welcome people of any background – religious, racial, cultural or otherwise. We are not exclusive in any way.”

The article states that members of the Unification Church perform “a lot of good works but sometimes show a darker side,” yet does not specify what the phrase “a darker side” entails.

“Therefore, this statement is merely a harmful insinuation that encourages an attitude of denigration against all Unificationists,” said DeGoede. “Shrum is making baseless claims that not only insult our members, but also leave them vulnerable to criticism by those who are swayed by his narrow-mindedness.

“This article attacks more than the three religious organizations mentioned – Good News Mission, Ananda Marga and Lovin’ Life Ministries. Statements such as “cults and other high-pressure groups can ‘suck the life out of its members to support its own’” and “those who take part in these type of organizations may be perceived as crazy by their friends and family” is an insult to all religious groups on campuses. This article is an invitation for the community of Pennsylvania to hate on new religious groups and disregards the fact that members from the Unification Church are themselves active members of the Pennsylvanian community. We need to better inform the Daily Pennsylvanian and students such as Shrum about who we really are.”



Gelo Fleisher (right) with his wife Kazuyo.

“I found the article offensive, odd, backward, and even irresponsible,” said Naokimi Ushiroda, who graduated from the Wharton School of Business in 2004. He added: “When I went through orientation there, the University officials really touted Penn’s diversity, compared to other Ivy League Schools. While I was president of the Collegiate Association for the Research of Principles (CARP) at Penn, we

were a religious club registered with the University, and we certainly felt like we were part of the Penn community. Starting in the Spring of 2002, CARP sponsored four symposiums on inter-religious cooperation in response to the 9/11 tragedy. At our last event, held in the prestigious Benjamin Franklin room, we had 140 participants, including many Muslims, not only from Penn but from five schools nearby. Penn's chaplain gave the opening remarks. The article implies that our church is outside of the Penn community. When did that happen?"

Gelo Fleisher, a graduate of UPenn '04 posted the following comment on the article online: "I'm a graduate of UPenn (Wharton Undergrad '04), and a very proud member of the Unification Church. While living in Philly, I went to the very church that [is mentioned and pictured in the article]. I had a wonderful time, deepening my relationship with God, and meeting great people. I was a much better student because of the support and help of my local church community. In our graduating class I believe there were four Unificationists; I myself graduated with the highest grade point average of the Wharton Undergrad '04 class. Don't listen to the conspiracy theorists and go check it out for yourself."



Rev. Michael Jenkins, chairman of ACLC.

Rev. Michael Jenkins, chairman of the American Clergy Leadership Conference (ACLCL), said in response to DeGoede's statement, "There are many clergy who will stand with and speak out for Crescentia DeGoede. This is an opportunity. We should not see the people at the *Daily Pennsylvanian* as the 'enemy.' The Civil Rights leaders working with the ACLCL tell us that we should not assume what their position is or their understanding of the issue. There are always good people at the newspaper who will listen and understand. The [reporters and editors] may be misinformed; it could be that opportunists saw a headline and an opportunity; it could be that the story was manipulated by someone out to slow down our success; it is possible that someone at the paper is committed to fight against us for theological- or other reasons -- such as that someone got the wrong information and just jumped to the wrong conclusion."

Rev. Jenkins stressed the importance of gathering students and supporters, including the clergy, to meet Shrum, the editor and publisher of his article and Professor Dunning to develop an ongoing and respectful dialogue.

"Our goal should not be to make them apologize," he said. "A forced apology doesn't advance our relationship. They should apologize but only when they understand and genuinely feel sorry about the situation. Our goal is deeper. We want to win them over as our friends. When they get to know Crescentia, they will be amazed. Their paper should be helping such an excellent ministry as Lovin' Life to be promoted for its emphasis on abstinence before marriage, fidelity and faithfulness."



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Some religious organizations near campus show 'darker side'

Called high-pressure groups, these organizations can have negative consequences for followers

Glenn Shrum
April 5, 2012



Lovin' Life Ministries has a local branch at 41st and Sansom streets. Religious studies professor Stephen Dunning, who has studied the church, said it could sometimes "show a darker side."

Last December, Engineering graduate student Di Tang and his friend went to an information session at Temple University for an "English Camp Mission Trip" to Mexico. He came in thinking this might be a valuable way to spend his winter break.

Tang, a Christian, said the session's speakers, who described the trip's objectives and presented personal testimonies, were very professional. "They knew how to promote themselves well."

However, Tang grew increasingly uneasy with the organization. “I didn’t think the way they had portrayed themselves was right with my beliefs,” he said.

Both the session and camp were sponsored by the International Youth Fellowship, founded by Korean preacher Ock Soo Park. Park also founded Good News Mission, which embodies his theology and religious practice.

Good News Mission — GNM — which has a branch in Philadelphia, is not affiliated with Penn’s religious community. It represents one of several what are called new religious movements present on and near university campuses across the country.

High-pressure tactics

There are organizations that have garnered controversy for “the quality of their leadership and the willingness of their members to sign over their autonomy to the group,” religious studies professor Stephen Dunning said.

Dunning, who has taught a course called “Understanding the Cult Controversy,” said certain new religious movements use “high-pressure” tactics to attract and keep their members.

Some groups, Dunning said, present their members with a “reward scheme” for recruiting, promising an easier path toward salvation to those recruiters who draw more people in. University Chaplain Chaz Howard mentioned others who, in the past, have offered students money to attend their informational sessions or scripture studies.

He added that, “For every 10 kids who take the money, eat the free pizza and never come back, one might stick around and say that this is really interesting.”

“In some cases, [high-pressure] groups thrive on making people uncomfortable in a constructive way,” Dunning said. “They want to show me that I’m missing something, so that I’ll respond positively and say, ‘Oh, I want to learn more.’”

Tang said Good News Corps’ ideology strays far from the Christian values he knows. “They seem to say, if you want to be a true Christian, you have to follow by the rules of the organization,” he said. “That aspect seemed questionable to me.”

According to the Good News Corps’ official website, their mission statement is to teach students, through challenging service work, a lesson which “not only changes their lives, but becomes a beacon of hope for others who are victims of their own limitations.” GNM did not respond to multiple requests for an interview.

Many of these movements, churches and organizations are derivatives or sects of larger, more prominent religious faiths like Christianity, Islam and Hinduism.

An alternate reality

However, it’s important to distinguish that it is not a group’s religious doctrine that flags it as a “high-pressure group,” Howard said.

“Most of these groups do normal service activities, identify with normal religious beliefs,” he added. “But

in practice, what they do can be harmful.”

Dunning added that high-pressure groups aren't necessarily religious.

After spending long spans of time in isolation from their homes, schools or places of work, members of these groups may need some form of psychological “de-programming” should they choose to leave their organization, Dunning said.

When people join one of these religious groups, “there is some need in them that isn't being filled,” he added. “And there can be a major, major break in their relationships when they come back.”

Dave Brindley of Philly Bridges, the international student ministry of Penn Cru, said cults and other high-pressure groups can “suck the life out of its members to support its own.”

He added that regardless of the faith with which a student identifies himself, it should be bringing out the very best in him. Tang is one of several active students in Brindley's ministry.

Marsha Goluboff Low, a 1970 College graduate who wrote the book *The Orange Robe*, recounts her 18-year discipleship with Ananda Marga, a spiritual movement grounded in East Indian philosophy. She said her experience went from passionate involvement to “a gradual disillusionment.”

“I came from a kind of family background that wasn't very close,” she said. “But when you join Ananda Marga, you get a new name, you get a new identity, and I felt limited by the identity I had.”

Ananda Marga first attracted Low in the fall of her senior year at Penn, where she attended a meditation session on campus given by a teacher from the organization.

Inspired by the Beatles and an influential LSD trip, Low soon moved into an Ananda Marga center, and in 1974, she left the country to work as a “yogic nun.” She was forced to sever almost all communication with her friends and family during that time.

After many years, however, she started noticing what she believed to be Ananda Marga's more “oppressive” practices, including strict hierarchical authority and sexism.

For instance, all women were required to wear full-length robes at all times.

“I started to see the way in which they put their ideas into practice was warped,” she said.

Believers

Dunning observed that groups such as the “Moonies” — an unofficial name for members of the Unification Church — perform “a lot of good works but sometimes show a darker side.” The church is one of many Dunning has studied.

Lovin' Life Ministries, a national ministry of the Unification Church, bases its theology jointly off the Christian Bible and the *Divine Principle*—a textbook co-written by the church's founder, Sun Myung Moon. It maintains a local branch on 41st and Sansom streets.

Crescentia DeGoede, a pastor at the 41st Street branch, described the Unification Church as both a “church and a movement,” encouraging its congregation “to inherit the true love of God by bringing people into a real relationship with God and others.”

She added that the church is making greater efforts to expand its ministry, particularly at Penn. It is circulating flyers and information cards at local coffee shops and changing its religious programming to cater more to young adults.

Lovin' Life Ministries holds weekly "satellite" services — broadcasted sermons from the church's main branch in New York — as well as several educational seminars and retreats. DeGoede said her congregation has nearly 100 members, a "handful" being Penn undergraduate and graduate students.

Dunning said those who take part in these type of organizations may be perceived as crazy by their friends and family. However, "real religion is a passionate conviction."

The way people perceive religious groups like GNM or Ananda Marga "is tied up with a general secularization of our society, especially on college campuses," he added. "You see the same kinds of things in sports teams, businesses or even the military."

Dunning advises parents and friends to "let the student have his freedom to experiment."

"I think it's very healthy to be involved in [religious] groups on campus," Brindley said. "But if there is a group that's kind of in the shadows, that's not officially or openly a part of the Penn community, be wary."