

## Miyeong Caroline Mendonca Wins Filipino Pageant with Brains, Beauty and Ballroom Dance

Ariana Moon  
May 17, 2012



*From left to right: Marvee Sanagustin, Miss Diwa ng Kalayaan 2011, crowns Miyeong Mendonca as the new Miss Diwa ng Kalayaan while the Philippines Consulate General of NY Mario De Leon looks on.*

Second-generation Unificationist Miyeong Caroline Mendonca, 16, took home first place in the 2012 Diwa ng Kalayaan (“Spirit of Independence”) contest, which is conducted annually to commemorate the 114th Anniversary of the Declaration of Philippine Independence. She was selected out of ten young Filipina competitors by judges at the Diwa ng Kalayaan Selection and Coronation Pageant and Gala at the Grand Ballroom of the Double Tree Hilton Hotel in New Jersey on May 5, 2012.

All participants for the contest, organized by the Philippine Independence Day Council Inc. (PIDCI), must be single women between the ages of 16-25, at least five feet and two inches tall and of Filipino ancestry. As the recipient of the prestigious 2012 Diwa ng Kalayaan title, she now represents PIDCI and the New York area Filipino and Filipino-American community as an Ambassador of Goodwill. In July she will join the Philippine Ambassador’s, Consuls Generals’ and Tourism Directors’ Tour to the Philippines. Mendonca is a resident of Clifton, New Jersey and a junior at Clifton High School.

“I was very surprised that I won,” said Mendonca. “I wasn’t expecting to win – I was there for a good experience and to meet new people. I became good friends with all the girls with whom I competed. I was shocked when my name was announced.”

As Miss Diwa ng Kalayaan, Mendonca was also featured in the *Philippine Star*, one of the top three broadsheet newspapers in Manila.

### **A Representative of God and True Parents**

According to Mendonca, the contest consisted of four rounds, all during the Selection and Coronation Pageant and Gala on May 5th. “All the contestants had to participate in a cultural dance, which we rehearsed together for several Sundays before the Pageant,” she said. “Then there was a talent portion, for which I ballroom danced while other girls sang, played the piano or performed cultural dances. After that was a beauty portion, for which we presented ourselves to an audience in a gown and a second time in sportswear. The last round consisted of a Q&A format, where judges would ask the competitors one question which had to be answered on the spot.

“The question I was asked was, ‘What was the greatest achievement you have accomplished in your life and why?’ I answered that the Pageant itself was the greatest achievement because it gave me the opportunity to show the beauty God gave me and the pride I have for my Filipino ancestry. One of the staff members of the Pageant interviewed me after I was announced as the winner and asked me why I had a Korean name. I told him that I am a proud member of the Unification Church and that our founder is Korean.”



*From left to right: Rev. Hirofumi Sakamoto, Miguel Braganza, Vilson Mendonca (father), Rudy Bahian, Miyeong Mendonca, Josette Mendonca (mother), Merlyn Loja, Michael Roman (dance partner), Elena Bahian, Hiroko Nitro and others.*

Mendonca says her anointment as Miss Diwa ng Kalayaan is an opportunity to “represent God and True Parents. I think God put me in this position of competing and then winning so that I could share our teachings with people outside of our church community. As the winner of Diwa ng Kalayaan, I will be touring and doing service work in the Philippines in July for several weeks. I’ll be visiting the poorer regions of the country and helping to educate people there. I want to be a good role model, and I want to educate people about the teachings of our church, especially about purity and our *Il Shim* program, during which young Unificationists pledge abstinence before marriage. I also want to teach ballroom dancing, which I think is a great way to learn how to respect others. I want to teach it the way we do at Lovin’ Life, which is with the purpose of facilitating healthy interaction between men and women.”



*Miyeong and Michael Roman (on right) who performed ballroom dancing together*

### **Ballroom Dancing as a Talent**

As she reflected on a possible talent for the pageant, Miyeong said in an interview with the *UC Newsletter* that her first thought was: “I don’t have a talent.” She then decided to ballroom dance, since she had been taking classes at Lovin’ Life Ministries since the launch of the Lovin’ Life Ballroom Dance Ministry in 2009.



*From left to right: Erin Manansala (runner-up, Miss Filipino-American 2012), Fe Martinez (President of PIDCI), Me, Grace Hufano-Labaguis (GMA Pinoy TV & GMA Life TV), Jessica Masangcay*

“I enjoy ballroom dancing and I’m pretty good at it. When I mentioned the idea to the organizer of the contest, Rolly Postadon, he thought it wasn’t a very good idea that I dance with a partner, since the talent should be something that comes from just me. He said it would distract the judges’ attention from me and that I might lose points. But I decided to ballroom dance anyway. With the guidance of Jin Sung Nim, I partnered with Michael Roman, who’s also 16 years old and from our church community, and we learned a Chacha routine together. On the day of the show, Michael and I danced really well. One of the judges asked for my number and email because she wanted me to perform for her at other events in the future. Rolly Postadon, who had initially been against the idea of ballroom dancing, was impressed and the president of PIDCI told my mom she was impressed as well. I want to continue ballroom dancing, and in the future, I would love to teach at a ballroom-dance studio.

“I got a lot of support from our Lovin’ Life community and members of the Generation Peace Academy (GPA) whenever I performed the routine. Since the pageant, I’ve performed it twice more, once at a ballroom social at the Lovin’ Life Learning Center and once in Washington D.C., for the D.C. community after Sunday service on May 13, 2012.”

Mendonca credits her success at the Diwa ng Kalayaan contest to her mother and family members. “I would like to thank my family for believing in me even when I didn’t have confidence in myself,” she said. “My mom was always there for me. She was the one rooting for me, she was my number one fan. My dad supported me as well, and my sister, who is currently on the GPA program and is fundraising in Chicago, called me right before I performed my ballroom-dance routine. Thank you all!”