

Interview of Michael Balcomb chairman, FFWPU Europe Regional Group

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Question: When the programs in Korea ended in early March, you had Mother coming to Europe in less than two months, yet you had confidence to fill a large stadium. What were your thought processes and feelings at that point?

Well, the story for me with big stadiums started with the Madison Square Garden a year ago [July 15, 2017]. In America, we had the opportunity to see True Mother quite often and we had held with True Parents many similar events over the years, with five hundred or a thousand, maybe fifteen hundred people. As far as we knew, that was sufficient. When the IPEC opened in Las Vegas, we held other events there. Two years ago, we held the fortieth anniversary of the Yankee Stadium rally at Belvedere. It was dramatic because Mother came and it was outdoors and it rained just as it had at Yankee Stadium, but not until the very second Mother had finished her

speech. Members were tremendously excited to have True Parents back at Belvedere, just like in the old days and to have Mother speaking on that auspicious anniversary.

We had made it a real festival. We realized Mother would like us to have fun, not frivolous fun, but she'd like us to enjoy what we do and to be creative. So, we held a festival. We had many different types of food, and displays about all kinds of projects.

It was great but at the end of the day, we still brought only three thousand people. A year later, when we were wondered what to do, we realized that Korea and Japan had set the bar quite high by having rallies with ten thousand people and Dr. Kim intuitively felt we should invite Mother to come to speak at Madison Square Garden. It turned out it was the right offering; she was immediately enthusiastic. She didn't think it would be a problem to fill the arena.

Then of course came the challenge of finding a place that was willing to do it in Europe. I had a few candidate cities, such as Prague, Milan, Düsseldorf in Germany, London, perhaps Paris. Fumiko and I visited all these cities and talked to members to try to get a sense of whether they believed it was possible. I'll be honest with you: the only place that responded well, with confidence, was Vienna. One reason was that Mother had come to Europe last time in 2015 and they had held a pretty big and successful event in Vienna.

Mother came to East Garden a couple of days later extolling the praises of the European movement and the second generation. So, Vienna put their hand up and said, We can do it.

Question: But Europe is a different ballgame from the United States, isn't it? In the US, you have the ACLC and Christian churches that can presumably mobilize congregations. Europe has nothing comparable.

This was one of the things Mother wanted to know, through the international headquarters. You are aiming to bring ten thousand people. If you do, are they all going to be members? I said, No. At most, half will be members, because that's all we have. So the other half will have to be people we witness to or friends or relatives.

That was what True Mother wanted to hear. Obviously, she wanted to hear that we would attempt to find new people.

We had a simple strategy. Because I had been centrally involved in Madison Square Garden, I thought we'd duplicate that effort. Many things fell into place. For example, we quickly found out that there was a major gospel choir in Vienna, the Longfield Gospel Choir, and they were very open to performing in the Vienna Stadthalle, because it was actually their biggest concert ever. Like all choirs, they want to perform before an enthusiastic audience.

We met the director of the choir, explained who we are and what was going to happen. Seeing the photos

of Madison Square Garden and of the World Cup Stadium event [November 11, 2017] here in Korea, they quickly realized that these people aren't fooling around. They can fill stadiums. We took the view that this was in a series of events that had happened in America and Japan and Thailand. It had a momentum of its own. It couldn't be stopped, in a way. They became our core anchor group. The choir was five hundred people, keen to come to perform and participate. This gave members confidence that people would be interested in coming.

The second thing was we made a clear goal. We have six regions, so we made a chart and gave the regions goals that added up to twelve thousand people. We had a meeting in Vienna in February before coming to Korea. They responded well.



Question: I noticed from the numbers-chart that it was a good response, considering the distances people had to travel and the commitment of time and money.

For example, the Russians, as everyone now knows, had to come two thousand miles or whatever it is from Moscow to Vienna, by bus. But they were smart about it; they made it a package destination. Let's go from Moscow to Vienna! It's a very attractive city. In a way, we shamelessly told people, Come and have a great weekend in Vienna. We tried to organize many other activities they would enjoy, such as the cruises on the Danube River or sight-seeing in Vienna.

Question: Was it all smooth sailing?

The truth is that we didn't get serious about the mobilization perhaps until forty days before the event. We had several kick-off ceremonies. Forty days, in our movement, seems to be the amount of time that people can focus on a project before another project comes up.

We felt a great deal of support from True Mother. My relationship with True Mother has developed over the last five years. I have to be honest: At least until recently, I didn't see Mother often. For a while, I allowed this to be kind of an obstacle. I was passive about it. I thought, Well, if I go to a meeting and Mother calls me to give a report, and she often would, that's when I'll communicate. But I learned from Dr. Ki-hoon Kim, that it is much better to be constantly updating Mother with good news or news of tragedies overcome involving the members. Mother does care about members' lives. She is interested in how God is working in people's lives. She wants to hear about it.

When Fumiko and I came to Europe, we felt, one thing we can do, that perhaps European members are not familiar with, is to encourage members to have the freedom to interact with True Mother. The international headquarters has been helpful with this, because people like Mr. Hyunook Seo and others have made sure that, on a fairly regular basis, reports are translated, though sometimes refined or shortened, and presented to True Mother. Gradually, I encouraged them, starting with the regional presidents, church leaders and all members to feel free to write a short message to True Mother to tell her what's going on in their lives. If something good has happened, or if she said something in a speech that has touched your heart, don't keep it to yourself; share it. In the beginning, people were reluctant, but as we got into the habit, it became second nature. We have a WhatsApp group with about seventy-five leaders on it, and now every day we are sharing testimonies about how God is working, and it is tremendously inspiring. There are many good testimonies. It gives you snapshot, and if you want to find out more, you can go there.

We also instituted a weekly prayer call; every Wednesday night, at 7 o'clock, for any member who wants to join the "muezzin call." We pray together for one or two things as a whole that we are focusing on. With eleven time zones, it is a bit challenging, but it does mean that anyone who wants to can be in "face-to-face" contact with other members of like mind.

Question: *When Mother was in Vienna, besides the public speeches that she gave, did she say anything else you might share?*

We had breakfast with Mother every morning. This was an opportunity to both report to Mother about what had happened the day before and in that context, Mother felt free to make suggestions and give directions. Her suggestions are always directions but expressed in a loving way, so that you feel that you would like to do that because Mother suggested it. She suggested that we follow up with the people who came but also with the people who did not come, who said they would but something happened. [Mother said] You can go to see these people and share with them what I said; show them pictures of people having a great time. You never know. Those people may even be more responsive. They wanted to come but then they didn't. What you mustn't do is just move on. The seeds have been planted but they need to be watered; they need to be tended in some way.

Another piece of advice is that you have to dream big, have a big dream for Europe. Ten thousand came today, but what if these ten thousand brought another ten thousand? Mother is very confident that we are on the verge of some dramatic breakthrough. The time is right and if we plant seeds now, a big harvest is coming. We tried to believe that fully. One thing we told the members in Europe was, If you participate in this event, bring your friends and contacts, you won't lose. More likely, it will advance your work by years if you do it well. I said to Mother at one breakfast, I think your coming moves the providence forward twenty years.

It allowed us, for example, to start the IAPD, to start YSP, to have a youth assembly with a thousand young people. Each of which, if had done them sequentially, might have taken a year. With the momentum of True Mother's visit, we could do them all in two days. There was a tremendous synergy.