

True Love washes away newspaper controversy in Philadelphia

Doug Burton, Leighton DeGoede, and Crescentia DeGoede
May 9, 2012



(From left to right) back row: Bishop Wesley Ledbetter, Pastor Leighton DeGoede, Shinho Spacek, Bishop Ricky Sutton and Pastor Shota Iwasaki; front row: Mother Wilhelmina Ledbetter, Pastor Crescentia DeGoede, Insook Spacek and Lady Linda Sutton.

A month-long dispute between pastors and friends of Lovin' Life and the editors of the *Daily Pennsylvanian* (DP) appears to have been fully resolved after an hour-long meeting at the newspaper offices on Friday, May 4, 2012 according to co-pastors Leighton and Crescentia DeGoede. The controversy had surfaced on April 5, 2012 when the DP had published a feature article about new religions near campus that offended the larger Unificationist community.

Executive Editor Dana Tom, an undergraduate at the University of Pennsylvania, began the meeting by offering to retract the article, to remove all of the associated comments, to run a correction note, and to publish a fair and well-researched article about the local church in the final print of the DP on May 11, 2012. She also promised that henceforth the editors will remove any comments on their website that use the term "moonie." She reportedly told the visitors, "You did not deserve this article."



(From left to right): Pastor Shota Iwasaki, Bishop Ricky Sutton, Lady Linda Sutton, Shinho Spacek, Insook Spacek, Pastor Crescentia DeGoede, Bishop Wesley Ledbetter and Mother Wilhelmina Ledbetter in the office of the Daily Pennsylvanian.

The nine-person delegation on the Unificationist side included the Lovin' Life pastors, State Pastor Shota

Iwasaki, two local clergy and their wives, and a young Unificationist couple; they sat down with five Penn undergraduate students to discuss unresolved issues. All members of the delegation gave their testimonies and opinions. Bishop Wesley Ledbetter and Bishop Ricky Sutton, both respected Pentecostal clergy, spoke words of encouragement to the reporter of the original story and to his editors. As the meeting ended, the bishops embraced all of the editorial staff.

Pastor Shota Iwasaki, the leader of the Unification Church in Pennsylvania, shared with the group how the original article had unwittingly played into the hands of professional faith-breakers in Japan, so-called deprogrammers. Rev. Iwasaki described the horrific use of kidnappings, starvation, torture and rape as "standard practice" in faith-breaking. He continued to explain that the Japanese police and government turn a blind eye and do nothing to help. "The people of Japan however, are prone to respect newspaper stories from the United States. Therefore, an article from an Ivy League university newspaper exerts a lot of influence and can only add fuel to the fire of intolerance," he said, according to note-takers as the meeting.



(From left to right): Pastor Leighton and Crescentia DeGoede, Bishop Wesley Ledbetter and Mother Wilhelmina Ledbetter, Shinho Spacek, Insook Spacek, Bishop Ricky Sutton and Lady Linda Sutton outside the Lovin' Life church in Philadelphia.

Bishop Ledbetter gave his testimony about the works Father Moon has achieved. He professed that he has been honored to work with Father Moon particularly in the inter-faith clergy conferences. He described that people of all backgrounds had attended the conferences, including Christians and Muslims, and from Princes to everyday citizens, and they all came together on a foundation of love. He encouraged the panel to get to know the people involved in the Unification Church and attend some of our programming, emphasizing that one cannot write about a people until one spends time with them.

Bishop Sutton shared his personal experience as a writer and minister and about accepted standards and ethics required to portray a person or an institution. He emphasized the power of the written word and that one must be aware of the influence it can have on others. He explained how assassinating the character of a particular person, such as Rev. Moon, "a world leader and man of God," or group, such as Lovin' Life Ministries, can skew readers' view of that person or group permanently and cause them to not want to be associated with the person or group. He made it clear that this is why people and groups take it seriously when their name is used in an article in a false or derogatory way. "Not many people are going to bother with a meeting like this if you write something false or derogatory about them. Most would bring lawyers and lawsuits," Bishop Sutton said, adding: "We could have come in here with lawyers, but we didn't." He also told the DP staff, "You don't have an easy job," and he encouraged them to do their research and try their best to be honest and fair when writing about a person or group. He conveyed to them that they can be great writers, and that he expects greatness from them.

After the meeting, Bishop Ledbetter said, “We thank God for the moving of the spirit. I’ve been in the situation where I’ve had to come to the aid of other people before, but one of my greatest highlights [from the meeting with the DP] was seeing how God intervened through prayer. When you get in situations like this sometimes you don’t know what to say but when you open your mouth, God speaks through you. And so through the prayer we didn’t really have to go into any negative standpoints. God was there before we got there, so you know if He shows up on the scene, no weapon forged against us is going to prosper. We enjoyed coming and being there because we are all family in the Unification Church.”

“This whole experience with the *Daily Pennsylvanian* has been a blessing in disguise,” Pastor Leighton DeGoede reported to the *UC Newsletter*. “It’s likely that if the DP staff had retracted the article right away as we requested, we would not have had the opportunity to meet with them and share so personally about the Unification Church and what it means to us. Now, not only do we have a respectful and professional relationship with the DP staff, but also a personal connection with them through our mutual learning experience. I look forward to developing our relationship further.”

Second-generation Unificationist Insook Spacek, who attended the meeting with her husband, Shinho, commented: “The meeting with *The Daily Pennsylvanian* was a success. I think we were all pleased and a bit shocked that they were so cooperative. As we began to express our appreciation, our panel was moved to share a little bit more and delve a little bit deeper into our movement, our ministries, and our hearts. The staff seemed intrigued by our personal testimonies and wanted to publish a new article that fairly portrayed our movement with emphasis on our new Lovin’ Life direction, deprogramming in Japan, and our inter-faith conferences. We were more than pleased to see the staff recognize our movement in a new light with the beginnings of a partnership between the newspaper and Lovin’ Life in Philadelphia. In retrospect, we had every right to march into the conference room armed with lawyers and lawsuits, but we chose to use what our True Father taught us and to win with true love!”

“It was a great experience!” said Shinho Spacek, adding: “Everyone had an opportunity to share their heart and express to the editors why and how the article affected them. I believe it was positive in the outcome in that they retracted their article and we now have another opportunity to share the Unification Church in a more accurate way. It was also powerful the way the ministers shared their advice and criticisms to the editors.”