

In Memory of Calvin Johnson

Crescentia DeGoede
May 30, 2019



Name: Calvin Johnson

Children: Apu

Birth Date: January 6, 1968

Blessing Date: August 20, 2004

Ascension Date: May 25, 2019

Calvin Sumowah Johnson was born to Flomo Johnson and Yamah Sumo at the Curran Lutheran Hospital in Lofa County, Liberia on January 6, 1968. As the first born child and male to the family, his close family and friends called him Oldman. He has one younger sister, Niway (pronounced Nahway).

His family is an ethnic mix of Loma and Kpelle peoples. The word Kpelle is often used as an adjective to refer to someone as hardworking and to refer to very humble people in Liberia and Guinea. This quality of humility and dedicated hard work is a defining characteristic of Calvin's heart.

As a young child, he lived with his parents in Zorzor, Lofa County. Lofa is approximately 180 miles inland from the ocean and the city of Monrovia. It is a rural town surrounded by tropical forest. Because of an unstable and violent home life, his mother moved with him to Telemu town when he was three. The town is approximately 23 km (12 miles) southwest from Zorzor. It too is surrounded by lush and tropical forest. The roads are still not paved and many services taken for granted in the 21st century have not been developed yet.

In 1978, he fell sick. For almost a year he was weak and chronically ill. After that, despite the danger presented by living with his father, Calvin was sent to Monrovia to live with him. Now in the military, his father was able to provide for him and pay for him to attend school for the first time. So at age ten, he began his formal education.

In 1980 when he was 12, while living on the Army Barracks, Calvin witnessed the initial military coup that marked the death of Liberia as he knew it. Calvin and many others in the country witnessed, either in person as was his case or viewed live on television, the execution of 13 officials on the beach. This was traumatizing, not only to the child within him but also to the mind and soul of his fellow Liberians. The next nine years Liberia was controlled by a military government. The time was marked by fear, extreme violence, and atrocities of war.

In early in 1983, a young Bismark Bamfo moved to Liberia from Ghana to prepare to go to America and study at university. Within two weeks of arriving in Liberia, Bamfo was witnessed to and he joined the Unification Church on March 7, 1983. Calvin's uncle and spiritual father David Sumowah was living in the area as well and he had been visiting the church. He invited Calvin to go and see what it was all about. It was at this time that Calvin began visiting the church in the 5th Sinkor of Liberia. Young Bamfo taught him his Divine Principle lectures. Having had first-hand experience of the horrors of war, it was easy for Calvin to recognize the truth of the Divine Principle and appreciate the vision of a world of peace guided by the realm of heart. He and two friends, Charles Deline and Augustine S. Arkoi, started visiting regularly. And in short order, they very quickly became three steadfast and enthusiastic HARP members (High school Association for the Research of the Principle). From the ages of 15- 20, they lived as full-time dedicated Unification Church community members. They went to school during the day. They witnessed to people after school and anytime they could. They committed to lecture practice and competed to be the better lecturer. When the church went fundraising, they went fundraising. And every Sunday they joined in song and celebration at the community church service. It was an oasis of pure love and joy in a desert of war and despair.

In time, Bismarck Bamfo would travel to Japan, Korea, Europe and then to the USA where he would settle in Massachusetts and become a Vice Regional Director under Rev. Kil Hwan Kim.

For Calvin and his church brother and sisters, this time of growth and healing did not last long.

Shortly after their high school years, in 1989, Liberia fell into civil war. This internal conflict lasted from 1989 until 2003. All told, the civil war killed about 150,000–250,000 people known and unknown.

When it began, Calvin was offered the opportunity to leave and seek refuge with other church members. He declined the offer and chose to stay. Few stayed and he was asked to be responsible for the Unification Church of Liberia. He and others went to remote areas of Liberia to shelter and stay safe. It was a dreadful time. However, despite the horror, a gift of life was given to him. On October 16, 1991, his only child was born, Apu. She was raised in safety by her aunt Niway and her grandmother. She emigrated to the USA in 2007.

When the fighting subsided, Calvin went back to Monrovia and he went door to door to seek out the Church members. He worked with them to rebuild the church. It was a monumental task but the fire of hope in God and True Parents burned in his heart like a beacon.

Inevitably, for his safety and in hope of finding money to contribute to his family, he left Liberia to go to the Ivory Coast. In Abidjan, he and countless other refugees were unwanted and uncared for. He sought wages in daily work. A place to rest his head at night was more difficult. He slept in the outdoor marketplace under the vendor's tables. Hunger was constant and disease plagued him because he couldn't protect his skin from the environment. It was then that he was often brought closer to the heart of True Father during the time when he was in prison and alone.

In 2003, while still living as a refugee in the Ivory Coast, he won a visa lottery. He was fully funded to come to America. The Lutheran church prepared airfare for him and he was sponsored in Concord, New Hampshire. One of the first phone calls he made shortly after he arrived was to find the local Unification Church. It was at this time he met the Buessing family.

He was welcomed into their home with unconditional love. Together they forged a lifelong friendship. And as it turned out, he was only 75 miles from the brother who had taught him Divine Principle, now Rev. Bismark Bamfo.

In 2004, after 22 years of faith and service, Calvin saw True Father and Mother for the first time. This moment was not lost on him. When he returned from that Sunday service, his face was sublimely beatific. That one moment he had dreamed of when he was 15 was now a reality. There was no limit to his joy that day.

In 2015, he was diagnosed with Liver Cancer. He sought treatment for it in Boston. In August after completing treatment, he returned home to Liberia. It was the first time he had returned since leaving his country in the mid-1990s. He enjoyed six months there. His daughter, now an adult, joined him. Together they reunited with his mother and sister and other family members. And perhaps most joyfully for him, he visited the Unification Church of Liberia and found it healthy with membership and projects.

The travel to Liberia was time well spent and when he returned in 2016, his tumors were gone and his liver was determined to be clear of all cancer. He experienced an 18-month remission from cancer. During the time between March 2016 and December 2018, Calvin realized many more dreams that he had never expected to see. He greeted his first grandchild, a boy, Mike Jr. He realized the joy of being a father to his daughter and a grandfather to his adopted granddaughter. Many defects of character that had bothered him in life, by the Grace of God, were removed and he experienced a joy that gave him a life second to none.

As a person Calvin said he "wished to be remembered as he was, nothing added or deleted." But he was also one of many who navigated through trying times, seeking the light and at other times being the light to many who seek peace and the divine love of True Parents.

Seonghwa Ceremony Details

Seonghwa Ceremony: Sunday, June 2, 2019 at 1:00 PM

Location: Boston Family Church – 46 Beacon St. Boston, MA

Donations to cover funeral expenses and care of surviving family can be made at [GoFundMe.com](https://www.gofundme.com)

Flowers can be sent to the Boston Family Church, 46 Beacon Street, Boston, MA 02108.