

## Making the Choice

Maio Baiocco  
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*Maio Baiocco created the curriculum, The Choice.*

It was in October of 2012 that Maio Baiocco began a 40-day condition of daily study of the Divine Principle. Through this process, she says she became aware of a general need among Unificationists to have a deeper personal understanding of God's "First Blessing," that is, to "Be fruitful" (Genesis 1:28). This revelation inspired her to write "The Choice" small group curriculum.

"We have been tasked by our Heavenly Parent to 'Be fruitful' in order to become the children that God could be proud of," said Baiocco. "However, this process is difficult and uncomfortable, so we tend to skip that one and move on to the other two. True Parents are always asking us to have mind-body unity, but I felt like we needed some practical applications on how to do that. We're often so focused on the Marriage Blessing that we tend to ignore this challenging concept."



*Purchase The Choice small group curriculum package from the Store for \$70.*

"By November of 2012, I was increasingly concerned that our community wasn't ready to receive people's secrets with an open mind. If Unificationists are not ready to receive others' hearts and their pain, our members are safer attending anonymous programs to work on their problems. I believe that as a movement we need a cultural shift."

Using material from the Saddleback Church's program, "Life's Healing Choices," through which Pastor Rick Warren led his congregation to encourage an environment of acceptance and honesty, as well as from other sources including the Bible, the Divine Principle and Rev. Sun Myung Moon's teachings, Baiocco created "The Choice."

"By January 2013, Foundation Day was coming and with it was grace and forgiveness for all of the members of our movement. Forgiveness can fall very flat if we don't do some self-analysis and find out what we feel we need forgiveness for. Understanding that The Choice would offer people a chance to take an honest look at where they were really at with their life of faith, I held the first small group study on January 6th. Unresolved issues in our lives – whether it's with our family, our job, our self-image or our past – can translate into negative behaviors and reckless choices that damage our marriage, our family,

and ultimately, our relationship with God. We all have something that we are less than proud of, and therefore, we encouraged the participants to talk about in their respective failings in a supportive environment. People were under no obligation to disclose anything they didn't feel comfortable sharing."

Participants first make the choice to commit to attending the small-group meetings and keep confidential what was discussed in them. Each session is started as one large group to hear the topic for that week, and then participants are broken up into smaller discussion groups based on gender and life experiences, such as the "mother's group," "sisters' group," etc. Halfway through the ten-week program, participants make the choice to "Reveal," that is, to take an honest look at their fears, resentment, misuse of love, and for what part of their pain they need to take responsibility. "Reveal" involves writing out one's thoughts, and each has the opportunity to share as much or as little as he or she likes. From there, participants make a list of people from whom they need to ask forgiveness and to whom they need to make amends, which, according to Baiocco, facilitates much of the "natural conversation" in a relationship.



*Participants of The Choice break up into smaller groups based on gender and life experience to discuss the topic of the week.*

"The Choice came at the perfect time for me in my life," said participant Victoria Roomet, then president of Collegiate Association for the Research of Principles (CARP). "I had been feeling pretty weighed down by my circumstances and was looking to start taking baby steps towards a happier and more balanced life. The Choice helped me do that – guided me in a very soft way each week and encouraged me to work through issues that sometimes I was just too immature or lazy to work through. I felt very safe and loved the bonds of sisterhood that my group formed. I see this as a practical tool for anyone struggling with the First Blessing, which is basically everyone."

"This was the first time I led a small group in our church, and I was a little nervous, but overall, the experience was really fulfilling," Baiocco said. "We talked about God's character and how we as His children can tap into that power if we are one with Him. In our church, we tend to look for others to be our vertical point, our center, but really, God is in each and every one of us. When we force leadership up on high pedestals, they're doomed from the start. No one, but our True Parents, can live up to that kind of pressure."

Participant Chelsea Legay, a Unificationist studying at St. John's, said, "What The Choice provided for me was a place in the middle of the week where I could feel accepted for who I am and where I'm at. The group was very genuine; everybody was honest whenever they shared, and Maio was a committed group leader who created this kind of warm and welcoming atmosphere. The content for me wasn't what was so important as much as the experience of just talking to other people and finding that others are on the same page or not on the same page as I am, and that either was OK."

Participant Linda Lee Marchant Perry, who is Baiocco's mother, said, "In this time of so much change, The Choice helped me focus on my relationship with God as the foundation for everything I am and do. It was like a light shining in my life, showing me where all the cobwebs in the corners were. During the course of The Choice, I was at Sunday Service, and I really prayed that God would be in me. I suddenly felt this warm light all around me, and I could see the shape of my body being full of this light. There was still one small dark area, which represented the residue I had to address, and The Choice helped me see it and work on it."

As Baiocco explains it, "Because of the way it is written, it can be done for a small group or a very large one," she said. "The only important thing to note is that all small-group discussions are gender specific. If you have a mixed group, you will need to identify small-group facilitators to manage the discussions."

"I really want our community to use The Choice. It provides a comfortable, systematic approach to taking an honest look at where the holes are in your life. I invite everyone to give it a try and see if it can help." Baiocco said.