

Peter and Danielle BURT have been the Community Leaders of the FFWPU Community of families in Brittany, France for many years.

Here they answer some questions about their journey in life to adopt and raise children:

When and where did you receive True Parents' Blessing on your marriage?

In Lancaster Gate, London, on the 21st of May, 1978 (118 couple blessing) We had to draw numbers for the order of Blessing, we were the 10th couple and received the Holy Wine from True Fathers hands.



How did you come to the decision to adopt some children?

At the time of the Blessing, True Father was aware that Danielle and I would have great difficulty in having children. So when he gave the conditional period of separation to the 118 couples, he looked for us and gave us only 120 days separation, like the oldest couples, before we could live together. Other couples had 18 months or 3 years separation depending on their ages.

Once together, we tried unsuccessfully to have children. From True Father's concern we realized he wanted us as a Blessed Couple to have children.

Without children we could not expect to experience the Heart of God in its depths and this was important to us, our reason for being. Several times various Korean leaders in Britain and Europe had suggested we adopt children, particularly Korean children from the church, but despite the promises to help us, nothing ever came from that. We had heard that the secretary of Bo Hi Pak had adopted children from outside the church. As a Blessed Couple as well as National Leaders of Andorra, we decided to take our responsibility before God and adopt children from elsewhere. After all, all people have to be restored.

What year was that?

I think that by 1982 we had come to the conclusion that the possibility of having our own children was very small.

We then looked into the process of adoption, which was complicated and required a lot of administrative work, interviews with social workers, doctors, psychologists etc. The waiting lists of various associations responsible for international adoption were

long but we put our name down. In France few children were legally available for adoption. Children had to be legally abandoned before being adoptable. Even if the child received one postcard a year from the absent parent then there is no legal abandonment. A tragedy for many children, who want to have parents. I saw a tv report about a hospital maternity where a new born baby was abandoned by the mother – I felt so sad.

In Perpignan one day shopping, we met a couple who were adopting a child from Sri Lanka. They asked me to telephone for them to Colombo, as they spoke very little English. In doing that for the couple I asked the person there in Colombo if we, Danielle and I, could come and adopt too. The answer was positive.

We had to put all the necessary papers together, officially stamped and certified, and get them translated. Then send them off in the diplomatic bag from the Sri Lankan Embassy before going to Colombo and depositing the application at the law court. After a legal delay of 2-3 weeks, we then should pass before the judge and legally adopt the children. All the time of this process, we prayed fervently that what we were doing was God's Will, and if it wasn't, it was easy for Him to stop us with all the papers and stamps and psychological evaluations we had to get. Even the head of the Social Services in Perpignan told us she liked us and would help us. This whole process took us less than 3 months from the phone call to when the babies arrived home! We were told never before had a couple been so rapid, so this comforted our hearts that God was there too.

As Danielle could not take time off her work, one of her nieces, who had just had a course in maternity, came with me to Colombo. The day we set out from our house in Bourg Madame to drive across the Pyrenees to Barcelona there was a really thick fog. It was before the tunnel under the Sierra del Cadi had been built and the roads to cross the mountains were narrow and twisting with many hairpin bends. Our Andorran brother who had lived all his life in the mountains, safely drove us across. We finally arrived at Barcelona airport after 4 hours in the fog to discover the plane for Amsterdam could not land in the fog, there was no automatic approach system. We had a KLM plane to catch in Amsterdam for Colombo. After a frustrating couple of hours we took off in an Iberia plane to Majorca where the KLM aircraft was waiting. But it arrived too late in Amsterdam! We stayed in a hotel paid by KLM, and after a couple of days took a Singapore Airlines to Colombo.

We had intended to arrive earlier in the week and take a return flight almost three weeks later. With all this delay caused by the fog over the Pyrenees, we had arrived late in Colombo. The legal process for adoption required 2 complete weeks to process the dossier and we had lost one week. The lawyer got me to sign the application on early Saturday morning. He quickly went to register it at the law courts. So counting the Saturday as the end of the first week, we had to wait another week for the legal delay before the audience with the judge. We had to arrange that he held a special session just for me as our time was short. Passing before the

judge I became the legal parent of 2 babies, Meritxell who was about 3 months old and Jonathan who was 6 weeks old.

Then I had to get them Sri Lankan passports and a visa to pass through Spain, which was a desperate rush to find the Spanish consulate the day before the return flight. On the plane from Colombo the air hostess gave us the best seats. Changing planes in Amsterdam we had to wait for several hours. The babies were in carry cots and seemed to be a magnetic attraction for every one passing by. On arrival in Barcelona, Danielle was waiting for us with joy, she walked right past the customs and passport controls, intent on our babies; picked up the carry cots and walked back out again without any control. Then we drove back to our home in the Pyrenees. The legal process in France required us to wait another 6 months before the children could be officially adopted.

When we originally decided to go the adoption process we contacted an association responsible for adoptions from Korea. They put us on the waiting list, there were many wanting to adopt but only a limited quota of children given for adoption from Korea. Two years later we pushed again but there was still a queue. Through Sri Lanka we had adopted Meritxell and Jonathan. Then out of the blue, the Korean association proposed a baby boy, 6 days old. We had to pay for his keep by Holt's children's services and the air fare. Danielle and I went to Paris where at the airport the baby arrived, carried by a Norwegian man who had looked after the baby, Jeremy, during the flight. We signed the papers and came back from Paris with a baby boy!

All this process took time and money. At the time the US dollar was highly valued and all transactions had to be done in Dollars. For us this meant we had made debts which took a long time to pay off.



How long had you been trying to have children at that time?

At least 4 Years. We were 31 years old at the time of the Blessing. If we were to adopt it had to be quickly as age was a factor.

Were you supported by other Unificationists when you decided to do that?

At that time we were missionaries responsible for the Principality of Andorra. Our central figure was Rev Kwak in the World Mission HQ in New York. We wrote to him to explain our adoptions, but he wrote back to tell us to give these children to someone else and adopt children from the Church. We refused.

We also wrote to a number of brothers and sister to explain our adoptions and ask for some financial help. Some did help us, but others condemned us. A day or two after the leader of France had rejected us, one sister telephoned us almost in tears to apologize and say she understood us.

Still we thought it was with God our adoptions would be accepted. When black Heung Jin Nim came a second time to Europe he had everyone attend a workshop in Camberg, Germany. Danielle had breakfast with him. She explained to him about our adopted children. He said, "why do you call them your adopted children? They are your children. God felt your suffering heart and gave them to you." This felt wonderful.

How did the children manage growing up beside Blessed Children in terms of feeling confident of their value?

As missionaries living in Bourg Madame and later Toulouse, we were some 800 or more kms from Paris where virtually all the french blessed couples were living. Although Barcelona was closer to us we had virtually very little contact with them nor with the European movement until Won Pil Kim as continental director brought Andorra back to Europe. Thus only on occasions of DP workshops were our children with other blessed children.

The psychologist we saw for the adoption told us he had one condition. We had to tell our children right from the start they had been adopted, even before they were able to talk. In this way they would know deeply and it would not come as a surprise. Meritxell when she was about 4 years old, said she wanted to take us to her country one day so we could become tanned as she was.

We brought them up as Blessed Children. Then one day at a workshop they were told by the European Blessing Dept Director that they could not be Blessed with other blessed children as they were not. They were 'classed' as Jacob's children after Jacob's House in America. This hurt them so very much. Meritxell turned against the church and still has not recovered from that sudden rejection. It was a situation which we never expected as no one had been able to explain to us how to Bless our children. Sadly mistakes were made and the situation was not handled with love and diplomacy, and our children were hurt.

How old are they now ?

Metitxell, named after the patron saint of Andorra, was born in November 1982, Jonathan in January 1983, and Jeremy in June 1984.

Are they happy that you adopted them? (if you and they are willing to answer?)

Our children were babies when they came to us. They have never experienced other parents and in this way are like normal children. Jonathan realized he was more French than Sri Lankan when he returned to Sri Lanka with us to visit his country. Jeremy was always proud of being different, the only korean in his school, for instance, and he enjoyed returning to visit Korea with us. Meritxell, because of the rejection at that workshop was very hurt in her heart and it has been a long process of healing which has not finished yet.

Jonathan went to Korea for a 120 day workshop, and there he gave his testimony. The brothers there told him he must not leave Korea without being matched. The heavenly Parent worked and Jonathan was matched with Mihwa, whose mother had dreamed of Jonathan. They were Blessed by True Parents in 2010. They have now 3 children who bring joy to our hearts.

Would you recommend other couples to adopt children in a similar way if they cannot have their own biological children?

Not in the way we had to go. If there is no other way, like children from other Blessed Couples. But we have seen even then, complications and difficulties arise. Today there is an international convention concerning international adoption. Adoption now cannot be done as we did it. Now there is no legal way except through the international associations created for that purpose. Thus the waiting lists may be long and frustrating with many qualifications required and not the least financial. At the end however, there is joy.

We do not regret adopting children. In 1983 there were few Blessed Couples, and fewer had to do what we did. In a way I think we pioneered a way for future couples. It was not easy and for a time it felt like the entire Unification Church was against us. However, in God we trust, and in our attitude, as Heung Jin said, is to be responsible. Nearly everyone condemned us, a few supported us, but it was our responsibility and ours alone. We often tried to get information on Blessing our children, but for years no one was capable to answer.

So we would suggest to other couples and offer help to adopt children. With prayer and determination the process can be done quickly. To have a good relation with the social services and other public services is important in the process. We adopted babies less than 3 months old so they had no memory of their origins, we were their parents. We have been to Sri Lanka and Korea with them to visit their origins but it was not so important to them.

Anything else you would like to tell us?

The Divine Principle teaches us about our Heavenly Parent's Heart. Why He created us, His children, was to experience Joy. Without children, without us, He could not experience Joy. He gave us the creativity and the heart to have our own children and experience joy with them. So through our children we have an insight into the heart of our Heavenly Parent. Without children there is no way we can be appreciative of His Heart. Without our own children we cannot know God, His Loves, His Fears, His Joys. That's why we adopted children.

With children; love comes naturally to our hearts to embrace them, we fear also for their safety in many circumstances when they are not with us, and we feel joy in their smallest smile.



Jonathan and Miwa with their 3 children