

HJ Youth Academy Europe and the Middle East: Newly Blessed Couple testifies to God's Grace and Principle working in their lives (Part 2)

Bogdan Pammer
March 4, 2024



Over the past year, Sara has invested a lot in the Hyojeong Youth Academy. For example, she created this video summary of the [Harp and Young Adult Leaders Retreat 2023](#).

Now, she received the Blessing with Connor, an American guy who seems friendly and witty. They were one of the 70 newly blessed couples that made True Parents' birthday extra special. At the [Birthday Pledge Service](#), True Mother said:

Thank you.

It is through Heavenly Parent's tremendous love and protection that we have welcomed this day, and we offer our Heavenly Parent infinite gratitude and glory. Through this one day, may the environment for Heavenly Parent be expanded on earth, as is the wish, and the object of devotions, of all members of the Unificationist community throughout the world.
True Mother, February 15, 2024



Also, Sara's story is one of gratitude and glory. But there were also rough patches. Here, you can read her testimony.

Read our [previous post on the blessing](#) and [the Top Gun Workshop](#) featuring participants' impressions. [Peter and Daniela shared their reflection here](#).

Putting God first

By Sara

Staying Connected

After STF, one main goal was not to return to my old self or lifestyle. I gained much experience and new understanding during the two years in STF, and it was time to test and apply it in a different environment. So, after STF, I made sure to stay involved. My mom, who is a national leader, supported this, very much,

making it hard not to be engaged in the community. Besides contributing to community activities, I wanted to find something for myself and remain connected to the broader European activities, given our relatively small community and disconnect from our European region due to distance.

It took me a while to find the right place to contribute. After a while of trying different things, I began supporting a Foundation's program that had some people I knew and overall connected to a forward-looking vision. I have been contributing there for three years now. It has kept me accountable in various ways, even when my investment wasn't the most sincere or motivated. It kept me connected to the vision, people, and the HP.



Riding Highs and Lows

There were numerous moments when I had to decide whether to prioritize school or God. These decisions ranged from small tasks like supporting my community Sunday Service with MCing, cooking, or cleaning to bigger responsibilities such as staffing or organizing workshops. It would have been easy to use excuses like being too busy or tired due to exams or projects, but my mom always reminded me of the importance of putting God first.



One such significant moment occurred during the summer when I was under immense pressure to finish a movie for graduation. Simultaneously, I was asked to staff a workshop in Gafrenz. Despite feeling lost with the project and short on time, I decided to staff the workshop. It became necessary because we were supporting two second-gens at the workshop.

During that week of the workshop, my bunny died, and my mom was in a van with some second gens and another parent who was hit by a huge boulder that rolled off a mountain. It was a challenging week, and I wanted to fulfill my role at the workshop and support those two second-gens. After a crazy week, I returned home to a dead pet bunny and the stress of managing somehow to animate something in an extremely short time.

A creative solution came to me to make decent animation for the whole movie. So, despite putting my school on the back burner, I was able to accomplish everything I had to. In the end, I graduated with praise from professors and received a scholarship with that movie a month later. Also, the family's van that was destroyed could be replaced through the support of the church community.

I could easily think, "I made the movie, I am a genius, so I got a scholarship." But no, it felt like it was not me; it felt like a blessing from God. I felt an overwhelming sense of gratitude, realizing that I had received it abundantly, seemingly undeservedly, and I felt God wanted to express gratitude for putting Him first. True Father talked about immediately starting new conditions and fishing after a victory celebration; he would run down from the mountain into the valley and immediately start new conditions, praying, fishing, and climbing up again the next mountain. I needed to do the same - acknowledge the blessings, remain humble, and continue contributing. I felt I've received a lot, and it's time to give back.



Matching and Blessing

Various expectations and concepts about matching and blessing have accumulated over the years. As I stepped into matching, I anticipated some changes to those concepts but didn't expect it to make me face so much of myself. Everything I had built felt tested and everything I had previously resolved was brought up again. It made me re-establish what I learned and tackle unresolved things.

I started on the matching website in May 2020 and was matched at the end of 2022. I didn't expect it to take so long, and it was not an easy journey either, but he unexpectedly decided to break our match. It was a shock and something I never thought would happen to me. I was sad, embarrassed, and upset that it happened. It was something I didn't prepare myself for, so it was hard to deal with. Fortunately, I had the unconditional support of my family and friends, which helped a lot with feeling valued and secure.

It took much longer than I expected to recover from that, and it was hard not to feel like it was impossible to find someone, but I knew that I would not lower my standard or lose hope and settle for someone outside the church or without faith. I kept slowly moving forward. In those moments where you see little hope, it feels like you are at the end of the journey with a sad ending, and it's hard to know that you are actually at the beginning of it. It was important not to get stuck at this part but to continue riding the wave.

I put aside M and B and focused on school, church, and everything else. I knew that at this time, as much as I was not happy with the outcomes, I continued to stay connected to God through working for my community and Foundations and that through that small condition, God could hopefully guide and protect me. After nine months, we received Connor's profile. Our conversations progressed quickly, and things fell into place. It became clear that we wanted to get matched and blessed, and the journey started to look like a beginning again, and we were excited about what was to come. Connor was everything I had never dared to ask for.

Our whole lives, we have been learning, waiting, and preparing for "The Blessing." It has often been a faraway goal; even during the matching process, you get too focused on the moment you forget, but finally getting there felt surreal. When it finally started getting real, and we started talking about it, we both felt a sense of gratitude and true blessing.

I am undeserving of such a blessing and want to give back for such a wonderful gift. Once again, I had to remind myself to move my pride and joy aside and continue giving, not forgetting to put God first because once we do, he will be able to protect us, guide us, and help us accomplish our hopes and dreams, too.

hyojeong.eu: What will you do with the Blessing you received?

We both feel very blessed to be a part of this Special 'Top Gun' Blessing. Learning about the meaning behind this Blessing and True Mother's vision for future missionaries helped us understand True Mother's hearts more. After having done multiple years of full-time mission on GPA, STF, CARP, and in our local communities, we are not being sent to another country to do a mission, but instead are focused on creating a lifestyle of living for the sake of others in all that we do.

We will continue contributing to our local communities and region as a couple and plan to find a shared mission that uses our strengths and passion to invest there. We have big dreams and hopes that we quietly share to each other and God, and hope that one day they may come true.

How did True Parents celebrate their Birthday in 2024? (Part 2)

February 16, 2024



True Parents are the world champions in introducing partners to each other and blessing them in marriage. On many occasions, they have expressed that they deeply love blessed couples and will take responsibility for them eternally. The Bible tells us that God's first words to human beings were words of blessing. Like God, True Parents want to bless, bless, bless.

So, what better way is there to celebrate True Parents' Birthday than blessing young couples in marriage? Not really. That's why True Mother celebrated her and True Father's birthday this year by blessing 70 couples.

Click [here](#) to re-watch the whole event.



Light and Sound

The first part of the program consisted of a theatrical drama concert. It brought together a live orchestra, traditional Korean songs, dance choreography, animation, and a light show. It blended with historical footage of True Parents singing, with a pretty narrator tying everything together. It was an exciting 90-minute program and a good step towards a more enjoyable and authentic way to tell God's story.



True Mother has a big heart for the arts. The arts nourish the soul and grant us profound cathartic moments. It addresses our spiritual needs often better than religion and philosophy do. True Mother, although 81 years old and feeling a strong sense of urgency to accomplish many things in her lifetime, still does not hesitate to invest her time and money to encourage and enjoy artistic endeavors.

What does this tell us about the space we could and should give music, literature, movies, theater, animation, etc., in our lives? And yeah, I am not necessarily talking here about Netflix...



International Kids with True Mother

Also, a nice touch was that members of the first, second, and third generations offered baskets of flowers to True Parents for their birthday.

Brides and Grooms

It is a tried and tested tradition in our movement that brides hardly sleep the night before the Blessing. Grooms usually get a couple of hours of sleep more than their partners. Is this necessary? I don't know, but it's somehow part of an exciting and precious experience. Despite these circumstances, the 70 couples were beautiful, beaming with an inner light.

Each of them had a unique story, and I only know a few of them, and those only partly. Of course, only God can weave together this magnificent fabric of love, life, and lineage. However, talking to and observing the couples, experiencing these small moments of joy, awkwardness, excitement, gratitude, and occasional despair, made me feel I want to get to know them more... and I encourage you to do the same.



Marea and Francesca from the Blessed Family Department were with the nine couples from our Europe and Middle East region. They have just completed or are committed to starting one or two years of public mission. That is the 'Top Gun' part in the '2024 Heavenly Top Gun Special Blessing Ceremony'. True Mother invites these young couples to stand with her, investing the start of their life together for our communities, especially witnessing.

The pre-show entertainment featured a choreography with dancers dressed as brides and grooms. At one point, the groom kneels before the bride, only for the bride to pull him up. Later, the bride kneels, and the groom helps her up so they can stand upright together. I don't know what it is, but this moment always gets me. I guess that is just how married life is.



The ceremony itself proceeded as usual. After the entrance of the attendants, True Parents, the officiator entered. The Holy Water Ceremony was followed by the Blessing Vows, the Blessing Prayer, the Exchange of Rings, and finally, the Proclamation of the Blessing.

The real-life couple **Nam Hyun-joon** and **Park Ae-ri** offered congratulatory songs. The husband, a **poppin' dancer** and rapper, and the wife, a traditional Korean **gugak singer**, not only married each other but also their styles with adorable results. But listen for yourself [here](#). At the luncheon, Dr. Balcomb asked True Mother whether she enjoyed this modern rendition of **Gomapsso** (Eng. 'Thank You,' one of Mother's favorite songs) or preferred the more traditional one by Jo Hang-jo. Mother replied that while the conventional is better for singing along, she did enjoy the modern take.



Traditional and contemporary styles harmonizing

The couples in their own words

The couples, in their own words

"After the blessing, my wife and I are thrilled that we are starting our life together now under Heavenly Parents and True Parents realm. We want to take this spirit to our mission country."

"Seeing you [True Mother] today at the blessing ceremony was very moving; we were both in tears. But tears and words don't do anything; we felt deeply that the only way to really love you is to work harder. Thank Wang Omma, we deeply love you".

"A special moment for us was the incredible opportunity to be a representative couple and receive Blessing rings directly from True Parents. Seeing the True Parents so close, we could not even think about this. We thank Heavenly Parent and True Parents for the opportunity to receive the Blessing. In the future, we will put even more effort into realizing True Mother's vision through offline and online witnessing. As a couple. We want to embody the ideal of the Heavenly Parent by building an exemplary blessed family that spreads a culture of heart."

[How did True Parents celebrate their Birthday in 2024? \(Part 1\)](#)

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Top Gun Mission: This happened the last 4 days

February 22, 2024



Admittedly, I haven't seen any of the Top Gun movies. It is not that I never had the chance. It is not that I don't like action movies. I enjoy the occasional action flick, and sometimes Yoshiko agrees to watch one with me. It just hasn't clicked yet between the Top Gun movies and me.

This lack of movie experience made me somewhat unprepared, and I joined the Heavenly Top Gun workshop from Feb 19 to 22. Four hundred fifty brothers and sisters aged 18 to 25 attended. Some recently finished their **undergraduate degree in theology at Sun Moon University**; others came as **freshly blessed couples**.

Tomorrow, 128 of them leave for their 1–2-year missions in North America, Africa, and Europe (unfortunately, no Middle East this time). By joining the program, about 280 youth and young adults from Latin America concluded their 21-day pilgrimage.



The focus: Spirit, Truth, and Stories

At the core of the experience was a resurgence of faith. The workshop was short. It featured three elements.

Spirit: Daily night prayers from 10 pm to 1 am: Stepping into the presence of God and resonating with Heaven's Heart.

Truth: Lectures on what God wants us to tell the world today. God is our Heavenly Parent. Mother God was hidden from history. The lives and journeys of Jesus, True Father and True Mother. Now is the golden time to get it right—as pure flowing water born through True Parents.

Stories: The life journeys and testimonies of those who went on their missions in 1975 and elder second-generation

missionaries. Listen to Mrs Theresia Kittel's Testimony [here](#).



The Background of 'Top Gun' in our Movement

There is a persistent misunderstanding that True Parents named the first international missionaries in 1975 'Top Gun'. On August 20, 1985, True Father was released from Danbury Prison. The first Top Gun movie, however, only came out in 1986. Around that time, True Father gathered well-educated brothers and sisters, saying he wanted to send them to the 'jungle.' The 'jungle' they ended up in was Washington, DC.

(Read Dr Bo-hi Pak's account of the first Top Gun [here](#).)

And yes, True Father loved the Top Gun movie. In 2022, Tom Cruise returned as Pete Mitchel.



'Top Gun' has an elitist touch that I dislike. However, there is much to learn from the historic Top Gun program. It trained fighter pilots during the Vietnam War and is an excellent example of **deliberate practice**, 'a special type of practice that is purposeful and systematic.' Anders Ericsson and Robert Pool discuss it in their best-selling book **Peak** as an example.

'Top Mission': Heart and Relationships

In 2013, True Mother re-started training for younger leaders and later youth under 'Top Gun,' 'Global Top Gun,' and 'Global Top Gun Youth.' The excellence she emphasizes is primarily one of relationship and heart. At the 2013 workshop, True Mother (Sep 23, 2013) said:

"I also like Joshua and Caleb. They were both descendants of noble families. They were loyal to Heaven for over eighty years. Caleb, from his perspective, lacked nothing. Yet, he united with Joshua. Instead of bragging about himself, he elevated Joshua first. This restored the Cain-Abel relationship and formed the foundation that enabled the Messiah to come to earth amidst the Israelites.

I have been thinking a lot about our leaders recently, and I feel that a culture by which leaders can love and brag about each other hasn't been established. We must be able to love and care for each other more than any other external groups because we are True Parents' children. We must be completely different. However, we are weak in this respect. I pondered on the cause.

I want to create new environments through you from now on. Do not seek only to get higher positions, but try to live for each other's sake, nurture each other, and be proud of each other. If you can do that, everyone can grow. On the other hand, no development awaits an individual or a group that is self- or group-centered and thinks of itself as being well-off and the best. You must understand this."

([read the full speech here](#))

The 2024 workshop concluded today (Feb 22, 2024) with a meeting with True Mother. At the end of her talk, she said the young people present shouldn't just leave for their respective countries yet. They should spend the afternoon playing yute (a traditional Korean game), strengthening their bonds of heart. They go out not only for Heavenly and True Parents but also for each other and all second-generation members worldwide.

Participants, in their own words





Gregor, Germany

My name is Gregor, and I am a brother from Germany. It's my first time in Korea. My lovely spouse and I came to attend the Special Missionary Blessing and the Top Gun seminar. My wife is from Venezuela, and after True Mother called out for people to take over an overseas mission, we felt appointed by God for this mission in the home country of my wife, Isabel.

The Blessing was wonderful, and we really felt True Mother's heart. It was a rare opportunity to be so close to her cause only 70 couples were attending the blessing.

To receive proper guidance, we participated in the Heavenly Top Gun Workshop with all those starting a mission in an overseas country. This is incredibly refreshing and inspiring cause we have the chance to meet all kinds of unique and exciting people in a similar situation as we are with the desire to fulfill Heavenly Parents' dream worldwide.

My wife and I are really happy and grateful to have this unique opportunity, and we want to take the love and blessing to the people of our mission country.



Daniel and Heayun, Switzerland

"First, we are profoundly grateful to our True Parents for the transformative journey we experienced during the 21-Day HJ Heavenly South America Youth Pilgrimage in Cheon Pyong.

It was the first time in Cheon Pyong for both of us, so we were very excited. Immersed in historically significant sites of our movement, alongside fellow groups like UPA and Top Gun, a full schedule with Changyang every day, the Great Works, and fervent prayers at the Cheon Shim Won during Vigil Prayer, we were able to experience so much, and more from the Place our True Parents build for us.

But before the Seminar, we dedicated a 40-day prayer condition and Fundraising to channel God's heart to connect with True Mother.

Throughout the seminar, we focused on Cheonshim Won to enrich our spiritual connection and deepen our commitment to aligning our hearts with True Mother, forging a deeper connection with her and our faith.

We received so much and can't express our gratitude enough to the Staff, the different Lectures, the Leaders who shared their wisdom with us, and our Heavenly and True Parents.

We return home inspired, rejuvenated, and eternally grateful.

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