

The First Years of Our British Church - Part 1

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As in the history of every country, there was a big struggle in Great Britain to lay a foundation for God to begin His work of restoration. I feel such a strong desire at this time to share with you something of the spirit of these early years and the precious ways in which God worked. Center diaries were kept in 1968 and 1969, which accurately recorded the day-to-day activities of how we lived in those days. I was privileged to have been one of the sisters who was responsible to keep the diary for several months during that period of time. How important it is now and will be in the future, to preserve the history of God's guidance to establish a foundation in England for our True Parents and the vital work of restoration.

Rev. David S.C. Kim, now in Barrytown in the U.S. [he was president of the Unification Theological Seminary, and he passed away in 2011; his testimony has appears in this series], spent more than a year at Swansea University in Wales from 1954. Later in 1965, Dr. Young Oon Kim, fondly known at the time as Miss Kim, went to London, England. She made great efforts to contact several spiritual groups but these people were, unfortunately, narrow-minded. For example, they regarded their vegetarian way of life so highly that they found it difficult to even listen to the teachings of a man who ate meat! After a period of 80 days in England, Miss Kim returned to America where she continued her valuable work. In 1965, True Father himself visited London during his worldwide tour to bless Holy Grounds. Miss Kim accompanied him and wanted Father to bless the place which had been her favorite place of prayer by the famous Peter Pan statue in Kensington Gardens. However, Father chose a large Plane Tree nearby, which had been severely damaged by people who had carved their names into its bark. The ceremony to establish the first Holy Ground in England was held on July 15, 1965.

First members join

In 1965, Miss Kim sent Sandi Pinkerton from the United States to make another attempt to begin the mission in England. Sandi had been trained by Miss Kim for several years before. In London she did her best to bring people to God. She tried to give out a lot of love to everyone. Sandi found a center in the middle of London and after several months, was joined by June Darby from South Africa. June had just heard a brief summary of the Divine Principle from Doris (Walder) Orme, while on holiday in Rome. At that time she was teaching at a school in the South of England. As soon as she returned to England, June looked for a teaching post in London, so that she could join Sandi at the center at 17 Emperor's Gate near Gloucester Road. She began teaching at a school in London's East End, a well-known rough area. This became her first challenge and she only survived because of her love for God and True Parents and because of her understanding of the Divine Principle.

It was amazing to see how things began to develop. June met an old friend in London on the same coach bound for Scotland. June and Evelyn Hardman had been at the same university in Durban, South Africa.

In February 1967, Eve became the first person in Britain to be witnessed to and to join the "Unified Family," as the church was called in those days.

Eve was studying Speech Therapy in London when she met the Family. At the age of 22, Eve was a very independent and intellectual girl to whom center life was quite a challenge. I am Eve's younger sister Patricia (Hardman) Hartley. I accepted True Parents and the Divine Principle in May 1967 and moved to the center, which was a small rented basement flat, two months later. I was training to be a nurse at that time, at a hospital in Ascot, Berkshire.

In September, 1967 Miss Kim, who was responsible for Europe at that time, visited and stayed with us in our humble center. She gave out so much love and inspiration to us which was very much appreciated and needed, as we were all so spiritually young and green. Unfortunately, Sandi departed the UK shortly after Miss Kim's visit. This left three inexperienced sisters who were not yet able to teach the Divine Principle.

Marion (Dougherty) Porter, originally from the U.S., but who had joined our church in 1965 while living in Italy, was sent over in October to London as our Divine Principle teacher. Miss Kim returned to England later that month and selected her to direct the teaching training in the center. She also elected June as the center representative. Marion was a very enthusiastic and energetic person with a loving and caring heart.

Desperation to witness

One day I was witnessing with Marion. We had made a condition to witness to three people a day and at the end of the second week, no one had come to the center and we were feeling quite desperate. It was late at night and we were tired and a bit despondent, so we went into a Wimpey Snack Bar to have a cup of coffee. We sat down at a table opposite two young men. Peter was from Australia and talked a lot and Bob Duffey was from Canada. Marion started to witness to Bob, and I talked with Peter. Soon afterwards Bob had to leave because the doors of the hostel at which he was staying were locking at midnight, but he promised to meet us again. Peter escorted us home across the busy Cromwell Road. We had nearly reached the other side of the road, when a drunken driver sped round the corner from a side street and almost hit us. Peter grabbed Marion and me and pulled us onto the pavement, literally saving our lives.

The next day Bob came to the center. He was only 19 years old and was globe-trotting at the time. This, of course, came to a sudden end when he understood the deep significance of the Divine Principle.

In December 1967, Bob had the courage to join four sisters in a humble center where we hardly had enough money to eat. It was wonderful at last to have some musical accompaniment to our singing. Bob naturally became the center guitarist. We all managed to find jobs and witnessed at every possible moment.

On December 31, 1967, four sisters and one brother sang and prayed the new year in with all of our hearts. January 1, 1968 was the very first "God's Day" and we all felt so deeply privileged to be a part of it. We really felt that we five people were responsible to bring back millions of British people to God's lonely heart. Later that month, June Darby, Marion Dougherty, Evelyn Hardman and myself made the HSA-UWC a legal charitable organization. It was to be an educational charity with the purpose of educating people in Christian principles and higher values.

Witnessing was such a joy and every evening someone was listening to God's truth, hearing about the Principle of Creation or what happened in 1960. Sometimes we felt so inspired that we could have happily shouted out from the highest roof tops in London that Christ was on earth. "True Parents are here!" We had so much power and energy in those days that we needed very little sleep.