

Coming Full Circle: My Experience Teaching at UTS

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It's a beautiful summer afternoon here in Barrytown. I'm walking on *Father's Trail* along the shaded path toward the lagoon. The sun is setting behind the Catskill Mountains. Memories of long ago fill my mind – trudging knee-deep in mud trying to catch carp; Father directing our activity from the shore; brothers and sisters gathering around Father as he talks about God's heart; President Kim translating.

I walked that trail every day during my two years of study beginning in August 1979. It was not merely a pleasant walk in the woods; it was my solace and where I felt God's presence and love –rain, snow, or shine.

Last month I had the opportunity to return to UTS for a most unexpected reason: to teach the one-week intensive for the doctoral students on "Spiritual Formation and Integration." The faculty member teaching the course retired at the beginning of the summer and Dr. Kathy Winings invited me to fill in. Though I had barely a week to prepare, I'd taken this same course in 2009 when I began the *DMin program* and so with my old notes and papers to refer to, I accepted the task.

It turned out to be a wonderful experience. The students are from different backgrounds and diverse faiths: Evangelical, Pentecostal, Baptist, and Unificationist. They have all fulfilled degree eligibility requirements for the *DMin program* and are eager to move on with their education.

When I reflect back over these almost 40 years, my mind comes to the only conclusion possible – ***I never stopped walking Father's Trail.*** There have been times in my life when I felt like I was still trudging through the mud trying to catch elusive goals, yet Father has always been on the shore giving guidance and inspiration. I realize that the heart of my own spiritual formation began right here and that following Father's Trail has been a metaphor for my own spiritual life.

The world of 1979 was far different from today. That period could almost be described as the golden years for the Movement. Father was leading at the prime of his life a very dynamic and enthusiastic Movement of young men and women who felt to the depths of our hearts that the Kingdom would be built in our lifetimes. Imagine, Father was only 59 years old!

Communism was at its height. The call for revolution was being heard throughout Africa and the Western Hemisphere in Nicaragua and El Salvador. The enemy was as clear as the nose on your face. Communism with a capital "C." There was no doubt about the focus of our attention.

When I began seminary studies our class had about 60 students. There were another 60 in the class ahead and another 60 in the class behind and everyone was serious to attend our True Parents and see the Kingdom ushered in. So often we were told that if we could take care of God's headaches now, then our children would not have to go this course. It was with that incentive and enthusiasm that we approached our studies in preparation for the Great Commission and our mission assignments.



When Dr. Winings emailed me 11 days before the course was to begin and asked me to teach this course, I couldn't help but self-reflect on my own course of spiritual formation, and how God has been training, guiding, and lifting up my gifts and talents all these many years to make me into a person of wholeness and balance. There is no doubt in my mind that the UTS experience was extremely meaningful and important to my own formation.

As much as the world has changed from 1979, so have I. After graduating in 1981, my course led me through various missions beginning with CAUSA, and then to the Summit Council for World Peace and the Universal Peace Federation, and an alphabet of organizations (AULA, ISC, CIMA, IIFWP). My formation brought me to more world capitals than I can count and to have the opportunity to shake hands with an unimaginable list of world personalities: Richard Nixon, Mikhail Gorbachev, Kim Il-sung, Kim Jong-il, George H. W. Bush, Pope John Paul II, and dozens of presidents and prime ministers from around the world.

Ironically, the one person's hand that I never touched was True Father's. In all those years I never had the blessing to physically touch either Father's or Mother's hands.

When I came to the seminary last week to teach the doctoral students we talked about how God has been a presence in our lives, whether we were aware of it or not, and how our actions have been guided by our spirituality and faith. Two of the students are from India, one lives in Las Vegas, and two are from Maryland and were recruited through the new UTS Extension Campus in Clinton, MD. Each of us, from different starting points, has followed our inner compass and been uniquely guided to this point together.

The students are intelligent, well-spoken, highly motivated, and with their own individual spiritual journeys. As part of the course agenda, they are required to write their spiritual autobiography, so we spent time discussing how to self-reflect and identify those times and individuals who inspired and influenced us during our lives and articulate those meaningful steppingstones.

When I wrote my own spiritual autobiography years ago, I recalled my college years when I was impacted by certain writers and their journeys such as Thomas Merton, Paramahansa Yogananda, and Hermann Hesse. I remembered my time in the Peace Corps when I was exposed to levels of poverty I never imagined could exist on this earth and how I questioned how people, the government, let alone God could allow this level of misfortune to exist. It was soon after my time with the Peace Corps that I was led to meet the Unification Movement and came to understand the reality of God's situation and insights into the true meaning and purpose of life.

Coming back to the seminary, where once I was a student ready to absorb information and receive guidance, now I was the teacher and the one who would offer the guidance. Although my life has had ups and downs, joys and losses, I've never doubted that Heavenly Parent always had a plan for my life. Through these many years I'd been called to utilize my talents – mostly as an administrator and organizer, a writer and witness, and in recent years as a hospital chaplain – but rarely had I been called as a teacher.

During that week, as I walked the halls and hiked *Father's Trail along the Hudson River*, I recalled our many hours in the classrooms with the teachers and faculty. Their images came back to me almost like ghosts: Thomas Boslooper, Sebastian Matzcak, Warren Lewis, Josef Hausner, Young Oon Kim, Henry Thompson, Joseph McMahon, Dean Stewart, Edwin Ang, Sarah Witt, and of course, President Kim.

I thought about these special people who were led into my *unsuspecting life*. They had credentials and experience, but they all also had great hearts. They freely shared their knowledge, but they also worked hard to uncover our undeveloped gifts, hidden treasures, and unimagined potential for growth.

Here I was, decades later, back again. At times it felt strange, like I didn't fit, like Rip Van Winkle waking up decades later to a world that he didn't recognize. Yet through prayer and reflection, I understood that God has been guiding me all along; that he has a plan for me, and most importantly, that he was very happy I had responded to his call to come back.

I realize that I have come full circle. From student to teacher and with the responsibility not just to impart knowledge but to help the students reflect on their past and current ministerial experiences.

In a way, it is now me standing on the shore guiding, inspiring, and talking about God.

As to what's next, well, that's what spiritual formation is all about. It didn't stop with my graduation in 1981, or in 2012 when I received the D.Min. degree, nor today at the end of this teaching experience. I realize that following Father's Trail is part of my spiritual formation and will go on and on.