

What is the Unification Church?

Until the early 1990s, the Unification Church was formally known as the Holy Spirit Association for the Unification of World Christianity (HSA-UWC). Since then the official name has been the Family Federation for World Peace and Unification (FFWPU). Hundreds of organisations come under the umbrella of the FFWPU, one of the most prominent being the Collegiate Association for Research of the Principle (CARP), the student branch of the Unification Church. Members are often referred to as 'Moonies', but they prefer to be called Unificationists.

Where is it from?

The HSA-UWC was founded in South Korea in 1954. Missionaries were sent to the West in the late 1950s; however, it was not until the early 1970s that the movement became visible to any great extent in the West.

Who is the Leader?

Rev Sun Myung Moon (1920-), leader of the Unification Church, is regarded by followers as the Messiah (see below). Referred to in early writings as 'Master', he is now more commonly known as 'Father'. While Moon's followers look to him for both spiritual and temporal authority, he increasingly appeals to the tradition of the movement as a source of guidance. Moon was born in what is now North Korea. His family converted to Christianity when he was ten years old. It is claimed that when he was sixteen, Moon was told by Jesus that God had chosen him to restore His Kingdom of Heaven on earth. Following this, Moon claims to have passed several years in prayer and communication with a variety of religious leaders including Buddha, Mohammed, Jesus, and God. The revelations he received were later written down and form the core of *Divine Principle*, the book that forms the basis of Unification theology. Moon began to preach and attract a following. He was the focus of a number of scandals and imprisoned several times on a variety of charges. During the Korean War he spent two and a half years in a communist labour camp (according to Unificationists, the overcoming of communism was a central part of God's plan).

In the early 1970s, Moon and his family moved to the USA, where he became known for his public rallies, impassioned speeches, and his support of Nixon's continued Presidency at the time of the Watergate scandal. In 1978, the Fraser Committee investigated the movement's alleged connection with the Korean CIA, thus fanning suspicion about the movement. Four years later, Moon was convicted of conspiracy to evade taxes and was sentenced to imprisonment for 18 months. Since his release, he has spent less of his time in the USA. He was banned from entry to Britain in 1995, although the courts ruled that this had been 'unlawful by reason of procedural unfairness'.

Local leaders

In the UK, the National Director or President of the FFWPU is currently Timothy Read. Since the late 1990s the system of national leaders has been supplemented by the formation, on Moon's bidding, of 'National Messiah Families', a group of Unification families from various nations. The aim is that a National Messiah Family will eventually settle in every country.

What does the movement teach?

The explicit aim of the Unification Church is to restore God's Kingdom of Heaven on Earth. The Divine Principle teaches that God created Adam and Eve so that they could produce a God-centred family. However, before they were sufficiently mature to be married, the Archangel Lucifer seduced Eve into a spiritual sexual relationship. Eve then had an illicit physical relationship with Adam. The children born of this union have been contaminated by 'Fallen Nature', a concept similar to original sin. Jesus was meant to restore the world to God's original plan, but was murdered before he was able to marry and establish the ideal God-centred family. He was, thus, able to offer the world only spiritual salvation; physical salvation would have to be the work of another messiah. Unificationists believe that Moon is this Messiah and that he and his present wife, whom he married in 1960, are the True Parents who have laid the foundation for establishing the Kingdom of Heaven on Earth. Through a process of 'indemnity', good, sacrificial deeds are believed to cancel out the 'bad debts' accumulated by individuals, their ancestors and humanity as a whole. Thus, followers can make a practical contribution to the restoration of the Kingdom through their actions and by following the Messiah.

How do they live?

From the early 1970s until the late 1980s, core members usually lived in a Unification community and worked full-time for the movement, selling literature or flowers on the streets, for example, or working for one of the movement's missions or businesses. Today, fewer than 10 of the UK's 550 or so active members live communally; the vast majority living as families with regular jobs and sending their children to state schools. One or two families in the UK send their children to the movement's own school, the Little Angels, in South Korea. On weekends, members can participate in a number of activities from youth groups to the movement's own form of martial arts, Won-hwa-do. Each year, a number of week-long camps are held for children.

The movement is now largely supported by its businesses (in the UK, almost entirely property) and by donations or tithing from followers. In the movement's early years in the West, followers could spend days at a time out on the streets in 'witnessing' and 'mobile fundraising teams'. Potential converts were invited to centres and then to residential workshops. Today,

'witnessing teams' have been replaced by a more low-key evangelism, conducted in individuals' spare time. Due largely to the demands of family life as the membership has grown older, followers now lead relatively settled lifestyles compared to the early days of missionary zeal. Sexual relations are forbidden before marriage, and for some time afterwards.

What rituals do members perform?

A number of rituals have become part of what is known as Unification 'Tradition'. Members observe a Pledge service in their own homes at 5am on the first day of each week, month and year. On Sundays, there is a mid-morning church service, which non-members can attend at some of the larger centres. Another service is held on Wednesday evenings. Each year five major Holy Days are celebrated: God's Day, Parents' Day, Children's Day, the Day of All Things, and True Parents' (Reverend and Mrs Moon's) Birthday.

The most important Unification rite is the 'Blessing', in which tens of thousands of couples whom Moon has 'matched' have been married (and which can now, using satellite television, encompass a million or more couples, most of whom are already married and many of whom will have very little, if anything, to do with Unificationism) An important ritual associated with the Blessing is the Holy Wine Ceremony, which, it is believed, enables the couple to bear children untainted by original sin.

Where are they found?

The Unification Church claims a presence in more than 120 countries. In the West, the movement has never had more than around 10,000 full-time members, although at its height there was a high turnover rate. Worldwide, membership stands at about 250,000 although the movement has claimed much higher figures - partly, perhaps, due to the inclusion of very loosely affiliated individuals. In the UK, the movement has 10 churches - four in the London area, including the headquarters at Lancaster Gate, as well as others in Edinburgh, Cardiff, Birmingham, Manchester, Bath and Bromley. The movement also owns a house used for workshops in Kent and another in Wiltshire.

Problems and controversies

In 1978, *The Daily Mail* published an article in which the Unification Church was accused of brainwashing its members and breaking up families. The Church sued for libel, attracting a great deal of publicity, but lost. The jury asked for the movement's charitable status to be removed but, after several years' investigation by the Attorney General, this proposal was dropped. The mass weddings have also been severely criticised, although the Unification Church says that the marriages are merely recommendations. 'Techniques' that have regularly come under attack include 'heavenly deception' and 'love bombing'. The former, whereby Unification evangelists conceal their affiliation

from potential recruits, has been excused by the movement as a necessary response to the adverse publicity to which it has been subjected. The latter, whereby Unificationists shower newcomers with love and attention, is claimed by the movement to be a genuine outpouring of affection rather than a manipulative technique.

Some people have voiced concern that the many organisations affiliated to the Unification movement do not make their connection transparent; others have criticised Moon's right-wing politics. There has also been anxiety about Moon's potential influence through his movement's policy of inviting prominent individuals, including politicians, academics and journalists, to attend Unification-sponsored conferences, as well as its ownership of *The Washington Times*. More recently, Moon's daughter-in-law Nansook Hong drew down more criticism on the movement with her 1998 book *In the Shadow of the Moons*, which details the physical violence she suffered at the hands of her husband, as well as his drug and alcohol abuse. She also made public the fact that Moon's behaviour has not always been in accordance with his own teachings and that he has at least one illegitimate son.

Further information

Publications by Unificationists:

Kwak, Chung Hwan (1985) *The Tradition*, New York: HSA-UWC.

Moon, S. M. (1996) *Exposition of the Divine Principle* New York: HSA-UWC

Mickler, Michael (1987) *The Unification Church in America: A Bibliography and Research Guide*, New York: Garland.

Publications by ex-members:

Heftman, Erica (1982) *Dark Side of the Moonies*, Harmondsworth: Penguin.

Williams, Jacqui (1987) *The Locust Years*, London: Hodder & Stoughton.

Hong, Nansook (1998) *In the Shadow of the Moons*, New York: Little, Brown & Co.

Publications by scholars:

Barker, Eileen (1984) *The Making of a Moonie: Brainwashing or Choice?* Oxford: Blackwell, reprinted 1993 by Gregg Revivals, Aldershot.

Bromley, David G. & Anson D. Shupe (1979) *'Moonies' in America: Cult, Church, and Crusade*, Beverly Hills: Sage.

Introvigne, Massimo (2000) *The Unification Church*, Salt Lake City: Signature Books.

Lofland, John (1977) *Doomsday Cult: A Study of Conversion, Proselytisation, and Maintenance of Faith*, (2nd, enlarged edition), New York: Irvington.

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New Religious Movements: A Practical Introduction (London: HMSO, revised 1995) has been written by Professor Eileen Barker to provide practical suggestions as well as general background information.

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