



## **Eleven Days in Paraguay**

By: Kerry Pobanz

Not really knowing what to expect, and just desiring to discover what Carol, my wife, was doing during her shepherding of the international service project for young people at the Leda Settlement in Paraguay, I chose to participate in the successive project for older folks. This project turned out to be a remarkable and intense journey, both physically and spiritually—a deeply meaningful experience, some of which I hope to share in this report.

At JFK Airport in New York, I met the minister couple—Rev. Michael Sykes and his wife Rev. Zena Sykes—who I would be sharing this experience with. The 11½-hour Aerolineas Argentinas Airlines flight from JFK to Asuncion, Paraguay’s capital city, was necessarily routed through Buenos Aires, Argentina, taking us south of Paraguay and then requiring another 1½-hour flight north to reach Asuncion. Interestingly, this time seemed to pass quickly and before we realized it, we had checked ourselves through Paraguayan Customs in Asuncion, and were met by Carol and by Mr. Michihito Sano, one of the long-time Leda Settlement pioneers, who was to be our guide. Mr. Sano had, in fact, planned out for us an amazing itinerary throughout Paraguay, principally highlighted by our three-day visitation to Leda.

It was about a half-hour ride from the airport to Asuncion where we had rooms already reserved in the Hotel Palmas del Sol, a small but very comfortable city hotel. Here we rested up most of Saturday morning and in the afternoon Mr. Sano took us on a walking tour of the nearby

city center, also visiting the older capitol headquarters building first that had been replaced by the newly constructed capitol building a quarter-mile down the road that we visited next.

Somewhat exhausted by our cross-city trek, we finally took a taxi back to the hotel and rested up again for the evening activity of attending an American Clergy Leadership Conference (ACLC) meeting. This was the very first meeting of its kind in Paraguay, and served as yet another opportunity for Revs. Michael and Zena to speak about their hopes to travel and learn all about Father Moon's providential vision to develop the Leda Settlement for the dual purpose, first, of generating food resources to address the great problem of world hunger and, second, of developing the preservation of the Pantanal region in Paraguay and Brazil. This occasion was also an opportunity for Carol and I to speak to this group of gathered religious dignitaries, enabling me to characterize my motivation for writing two books about life in the spirit world and the nature of spiritual reality. After these several short addresses, our gathering shared together more informally over snacks, generating a very upbeat feeling within the group.

These experiences were complemented the next day, Sunday, by our drive across town to the Asuncion Unification Church center, especially because I was perceiving that the whole environment of palm trees and tropical plants, together with the general atmosphere of the casual but deep friendliness of the people, to be very similar to that in which I had grown up in Hawaii—I immediately felt at home in Paraguay.

The member families who had arrived for Sunday service at the church center seemed to be wonderful people, profusely welcoming our special group of five, and especially embracing minister Rev. Michael Sykes and his Catholic wife, Rev. Zena. As special presenters, Rev. Zena first played her guitar and sang "I Am a Friend of God" in three languages—Korean, Spanish, and English, as the introduction to Rev. Michael sharing his remarkable account of how he first met Rev. Moon and then his humorous testimony of how he met and married Rev. Zena, primarily through Father Moon's inspiration.

The service was quickly followed by a delicious communal lunch, at which Revs. Michael and Zena, and Carol and I, were introduced to the church leaders of both the national Unification Church ministry in Paraguay and the local UC ministry in Asuncion.

Within a couple of hours, however, it was time for us to depart Asuncion and, under the guidance of Mr. Sano, to journey to our first major destination Loma Plata in the Chaco region of Paraguay—essentially the whole northern half of the country (actually about 60% of Paraguay's land area) that is an extremely desolate and barren lowlands bereft of most meaningful vegetation and otherwise covered with scrub grass, thorny shrubs, and aimless, dirty palm tree groves. Whereas 2% of Paraguay's population lives in this Chaco region, about 98% of Paraguay's population lives in the southern half of the country (about 40% of Paraguay's land area), with its rich soil, abundant crops and ample resources.

In any case, there is only one two-lane road that leads from Asuncion across the Chaco for 500 miles, and arrives at Loma Plata, which is where the main Mennonite community is situated, and which we planned to visit. The trip along this road took about six hours, with the latter half of this period being a rather hilarious continuous detour, swerving wildly around massive consecutive potholes for the final 40-mile stretch of the road before reaching Loma Plata.



Due to Mr. Sano’s indefatigably precise driving, however, we did manage to arrive safely in Loma Plata at about 9:00 at night, and without destroying our vehicle. Mr. Sano had previously arranged reservations at the

hotel where we were staying and, once we had loaded our luggage into our rooms, we gathered again to have dinner at a rodízio restaurant right next door to the hotel. The food was quite good, highlighted of course by the waiters successively visiting each of us several times to cut off slices of freshly grilled, assorted cuts of beef directly onto our plates. Once back at the hotel, we were clearly exhausted from driving and eating, and we all quickly fell asleep.

The next morning, we took a short jaunt in the car to the visitors’ center for the Mennonite community, discovering our prearranged guide to be a friendly young man about 24 years old, obviously well-educated, who had grown up in that community. He first had us view a very informative video, and then led us to the local museum, which told the fascinating story of the Mennonites’ origins, as well as of their particular historical development in the Chaco region.

In fact, the Mennonites in Paraguay originally migrated there from Canada about 90 years ago, seeking the opportunity to leave the public schools in Canada and create their own schools in accord with their own Christian beliefs, otherwise expecting, from the reports they had received from Paraguay, that they would participate in pioneering the “Promised Land.” After great travel hardships in 1927, about 1,750 settlers arrived in Paraguay to take possession of the land allotted to them by the Paraguayan government. However, the reality of life in the Chaco region proved devastatingly difficult. In the first year or so, about 120 people died and hundreds more found means to leave and return to Canada. The 1,600+ who remained in Paraguay eventually succeeded in overcoming all the intense obstacles, meticulously manipulating the clay soil to grow good crops, together with raising cattle and other herds.

Our guide then led us one building over to the full-scale dairy plant the Mennonites have built. The milk processed at their dairy plant is famous countrywide for its high quality and has

become a very substantial source of income for the community. Next, we drove a few miles to the outskirts of the town to visit the Mennonites' large, full-scale, modern slaughterhouse processing more than 1,000 cows a day into world-famous beef products. It is well-known that slaughterhouses use many thousands of gallons of water per day to carry out their processing of cows. Since the Chaco region is bone-dry with minimal rainfall, the Mennonites have employed extraordinary ingenuity to preserve all rain water first, by corrugating the surrounding landscape for about a mile into furrows that slant downhill into common collecting pools, and second, by transferring this substantial amount of water from the collecting pools into huge tanks above-ground—an amazing feat that permits the slaughterhouse to function year-round.

While we did not get to see the actual process of killing the cows, we did view how each carcass is carefully cut up into pieces, and how every part of the cow is used for some constructive purpose, including the skin, the bones, the fat, the organs, etc.—nothing is wasted. Needless to say, this was a very educational experience, but it perhaps left a more difficult and ambiguous impression on one's heart.

From there, we drove back into town, stopped for lunch, picked up our luggage, and then made our way back out of the city on the single two-lane pothole-ridden road—once again helplessly laughing nonstop for about the first 40 miles, as we continued to swerve back and forth like a carful of drunken sailors. Eventually, after a couple of hours, though, there was a road that went east, which we took to eventually travel across the country to the city of Vallemi, where we would arrive at our next hotel. In the process of following this itinerary, we necessarily ended up passing through the small town of Concepcion at about 7:00 at night. This town presented such an unusual spectacle, at least for all of us except Mr. Sano. The central street of the town was paved, and many of the side streets leading off into the neighborhoods were paved for about two or three blocks but, after that, there were only dirt roads in most places. In the very center of the town was a giant statue/construction about 30 to 40 feet high of Mother Mary with the baby Jesus in her arms. But the most unusual and shocking aspect of this town was the fact that there were few cars on the road, otherwise engulfed by hundreds of mostly young people on motorbikes and motorcycles. No one wore a helmet. And quite often, you would see three or four people on one motorcycle—sometimes whole families, with the father driving, the son right behind him, then the mother, cradling a new baby in her arms. Extraordinary! But this apparently is the prevailing spirit of many towns in Paraguay, Brazil, and South America in general.

Reaching Concepcion, we turned north, traveling the only paved road between Concepcion and Vallemi for about four hours. Since this road was all but completely bereft of streetlights, it seemed to us that we were traveling in a pitch black night, except for the headlights on our vehicle. About half-way to Vallemi, we encountered a road block set up by the Paraguayan police, who motioned to us to stop and directed us to the side of the road. We were asked to step out of our car and show our passports, after which they questioned us about what our business in Paraguay was and where were we traveling to. When Mr. Sano explained that our eventual destination was the Leda Settlement at Puerto Leda, the main policeman immediately softened his somewhat officious

questioning, mentioning that he had grown up in that region of Paraguay, was quite familiar with the saving efforts of the Leda group and it was clear that he felt a genuine camaraderie with us. After this, our passports were returned to us and we were sent on our way, finally arriving quite late at our hotel, and immediately falling asleep in lumpy but not uncomfortable beds.

The next morning, which was Day 4 of our trip, we awoke, consumed a very quick, makeshift breakfast and headed down to the main dock on the Paraguay River a short distance away. Mr. Sano drove all our luggage down to the dock and turned the car over to a friend who would drive it back to Asuncion. Shortly, then, all five of us plus the boat captain and our luggage boarded this medium-sized speedboat, with the captain passing out a life jacket to each person. So, at about 9:00 in the morning, we began speeding north up the Paraguay River, traveling about 40 mph, which actually seemed very fast.

After about three hours, our first stop along the Paraguay River was the town of Olimpo. The speedboat pulled into a very small, rather nondescript port area where we all jumped down off the boat into the dense riverside savanna vegetation and then walked up the unpaved driveway to enter the Unification property through a broken fence. From there we walked about a thousand feet across a large yard of stiff grass baking in the hot sun to where the residence was located. The property appeared to be in a state of general disrepair, apparently vacated years earlier—though it was also clear there were currently ongoing major efforts to try to restore the several large buildings where Father Moon had once lived and spoken to the fresh-faced Japanese men who would eventually become the rugged, absolutely dedicated Leda Settlement pioneers. Mr. Sano guided us in our visit through these three buildings. After this excursion, most of us rode in the back of a small, ramshackle pickup truck along unpaved, dusty, hot roads for about a mile, then traveling on a slightly paved, winding road several hundred feet up the hillside, ending in what seemed to be a kind of parking lot for the very old Catholic church that stood at the top of the great hill. The view of the town below, together with the majestic Paraguay River, was refreshingly panoramic. Though the church was closed and we were not able to tour its interior, our party of five determined instead simply to gather in a circle, in the ninety-degree sun, to offer a prayer of gratitude to God.

Immediately afterward, we climbed back into the truck and coasted down the access road back into the minimal environs of Olimpo, heading next for the elementary school where Carol had several weeks earlier brought the 20 young people participating in the international service project. As it turned out, the school was in session, but at our arrival the teachers were quite excited to receive us, and so they let the children out to play in the schoolyard. Our meeting was filled with joyful hugging and handshaking, whereupon the three indigenous young women teachers took us on a special tour through a number of the renovated classrooms. They were so happy to see us and enthusiastically pointed out the beautiful hand-painted mural across a 25-foot inside wall of one classroom, the mural that the young international folks had collectively painted on the day they also labored to paint the considerable exterior of the school buildings.

After spending a couple of wonderful hours in Olimpo, it was necessary to regather ourselves, and to drive back and again board the speedboat. Making only one bathroom stop during the last hour of our boat trip at the side of the river in the dense foliage, we finally arrived at the Leda Settlement around 3:00 p.m. As we approached the Leda port, we were greeted by 10–15



residents who cheered our arrival. We were all really happy to reach our destination and to be able to stretch out from our cramped boat ride.

At Leda, we were driven about a quarter-mile to the lodgings that had been lovingly prepared for us, where we did some unpacking. While Revs. Michael and Zena Sykes opted to rest up in their apartment until dinner, Carol and I chose the delightful activity of swimming in the Olympic-size, in-ground pool built next to the dining hall. Even

though, technically, it was winter in Leda, the temperature at our arrival and for the next three days was about 90 degrees, so our brief swim in the pool was greatly refreshing. Our two couples were prepared for the usual communal Leda dinner at 6:30 p.m., and Mr. Sano drove out to pick us up and take us to the dining hall.

During dinner, we also met another of the original pioneers of Leda, Mr. Nakata, who greeted us with great care and delight. We discovered Mr. Nakata—the overall leader of the Leda community—to be a wonderfully sincere person, completely dedicated to Father Moon’s original inspiration to use the Leda property to find ways of helping to eliminate the problem of world hunger. Over the past two decades of trying to address this challenge, the Leda pioneers have struggled monumentally to discover crops that would grow, and even thrive, in the barren Chaco soil. They tested hundreds of different kinds of plants, most of which did not work out at all. After all these intensive labors, they eventually found that two kinds of plants could be usefully farmed on the property—neem trees and taro plants.

In addition to these agricultural successes, Mr. Nakata has worked tirelessly to develop fish-farming of the Pacu fish, which has also been very successful. This operation currently entails the creation of special lakes, a half-mile by a half-mile wide—five of these dug side-by-side, separated by elevated strips of land upon which dirt roads are created. Hundreds of thousands of Pacu are raised to a certain age in these lakes and, while some of these are given to the indigenous folks and others are sold at market, official fish-release ceremonies are also held periodically and 50–100 thousand baby Pacu are usually released into the Paraguay River—to honor the loving principle of giving back to the creation that has given so much to us.

In any case, our first dinner at Leda was a joyful sharing with the residents over a delicious meal of Leda-produced fish and vegetables. At about 8:00 p.m., everyone returned to their lodgings.

Our first full day in Leda was Day 5 of our trip. We began the day with breakfast prepared by the dedicated kitchen staff. Afterward, because Rev. Michael Sykes had expressed his sincere desire to experience milking a cow, Mr. Nakata drove our party out to where the milk cows were corralled. One of the men who normally cared for these cows demonstrated for Mike the technique of manually manipulating the cow's udder and squirting the milk into a pail. Mike was quite fascinated to actually do this himself, while the rest of us stood around him taking 'udderly-stunning' pictures with our smart phones. One might say that Rev. Mike Sykes milked that occasion for all it was worth!

Next, a short drive took us to one of the main educational buildings that had always been available for conferences in the past, and here our group gathered and watched several fascinating orientation videos of the historical development of the Leda Settlement over the past 30 years. This was also an opportunity for us to ask Mr. Sano and Mr. Nakata a number of questions about their extraordinary efforts and sacrifices during the early days of constructing the numerous buildings on the barren property, while being attacked by caiman, snakes, and horrendous seasonal heat.

When we finished touring through several giant lecture halls—auditoriums capable of seating hundreds of people and otherwise used for workshop purposes in past years—we exited this area and walked a short distance to the Paraguayan Police Station built by



the Leda community to honor the Paraguayan authorities with a northernmost outpost, as well as the Leda-refurbished building used as a Paraguayan naval station. It is certainly true that the Paraguayan government is very impressed by, and grateful for, the singular achievements and contributions of the Leda Settlement.

Next, Mr. Nakata took us to visit the capybara enclosure. The capybara is a strange-looking creature, often likened to a giant river rat. Yet, on the other hand, they are seemingly gentle creatures that will allow you to pet their spiny-haired exterior. We also watched as the whole capybara family trundled together over to their five-foot-square swimming pool to cool off in the 90-degree sun. From there, we walked 100 yards to an unfinished three-story building, the bottom

floor of which housed the fish insemination and initial incubation facilities enabling the full-scale fish-farming operation, as well as serving as a processing center for designing and creating new food products from fish-powder and taro root. Here we also taste-tested some of these foodstuffs, finding them quite delicious.

About a quarter-mile away, Mr. Nakata showed us the taro field, where five or six different kinds of taro were being grown experimentally. One of the hired indigenous workers at Leda waded out into a small pond and pulled up a taro plant, exposing its large bulbous root. Taro grows in an environment similar to that in which rice is cultivated, i.e., in shallow ponds. When the taro root was sliced open, one could see that it has a starchy nature, one that is also full of nutritious elements. In addition, we learned that taro never needs to be replanted, since its next generation of plants—its “children”—grow around it in a circular manner as offshoots to the main taro root. Hence, every six months a new generation of multiple taro roots can be harvested as an ongoing, ample food supply.

After lunch, Mr. Nakata was ready to drive us on a more extensive tour of the property, but ended up calling for us first to come over to our lodging area, where he showed us a caiman, or small alligator, sunning itself about 50 feet away on the bank of the Paraguay River. Then we drove out to see the grove of neem trees, which is so far the only other plant that grows well on the property. Neem trees are known for their medicinal character, and are often used in health food products. Our drive eventually took us to view the huge fish-farming ponds recently dug and filled with water from the immediately adjacent Paraguay River. Finally, in the late afternoon, Mr. Sano and Mr. Nakata took us to a remote area to give us the experience of manually cutting down a couple of the palm trees with axes—an extremely taxing, labor-intensive activity that provided ample hand-blisters to our two couples. From this, we could clearly appreciate that the original pioneering efforts at Leda were not for the faint-hearted.

We rested up before dinner, at which Revs. Michael and Zena Sykes generously shared their hearts of appreciation by singing two songs and giving their testimonies of how Father Moon had originally chosen them as two of an original 12 disciples who would hopefully carry on his work. In addition, they described their first witnessing tour across the northern United States, visiting many Unification Church centers, as well as other Protestant and Catholic religious leaders, bringing the message of the need to strengthen families and communities through the marriage Blessing. All of us then retired to our lodgings by about 9:00 p.m., much inspired though, as usual, quite exhausted.

Our third day at Leda, which was also the sixth day of our trip, hosted a very special and heart-warming activity—our visitation to the three indigenous villages of Diana, Bahia Negra, and Esperanza, all located (at the three respective ports—Puerto Diana, Puerto Bahia Negra, and Puerto Esperanza) on the Paraguay River north of the Leda Settlement. We traveled first on the Good Go fishing boat to the village of Diana, about two hours north of Leda, where we disembarked and walked a very short distance into the small, poverty-stricken community. Most of the people who

live in these indigenous communities are descendants of the Guarani Indians. Since we walked directly into the school yard, we were cheerfully met by the school's principal and three or four teachers, who taught all grades from kindergarten through high school. At first we were invited into a dilapidated wooden shack-like building to meet all the young children up to 10 years old (about 50 of them). Revs. Michael and Zena Sykes spoke very briefly to them, then Rev. Zena sang them a song with her guitar, and finally the couple handed out the gift they had for the children—candy in the form of dum-dum suckers. The kids were very delighted by this gesture. Then, we left these young folks and walked a hundred yards over to the new school building that the Leda pioneers had built for the older kids. There were about four or five separate classrooms and it was clear that, not only was the building carefully constructed of high-quality building materials, but that the desks and school supplies being used by these older students were also of good quality. Both because Paraguay's central government is not that wealthy, and because the government has not focused on aiding the indigenous communities—especially those residing in the Chaco region—and has otherwise emphasized allocating its resources to more populated regions, the indigenous communities have been left mostly to fend for themselves. For this reason, the Leda Settlement took the initiative to build a number of small but beautiful and sturdy school buildings for these otherwise poverty-stricken communities. These communities are deeply grateful for Leda's support.



Indeed, at this point, the few teachers collectively gave each of our two couples a gift—a home-made Dreamcatcher, organically assembled by creative kids in their community—a symbol of goodwill protection that only good dreams/thoughts will pass through the Dreamcatcher, while bad dreams/thoughts will be snared in the net, and disappear with the advent of daylight.

So, it was only natural then that all of us from the Leda group were immediately invited by an indigenous family to share lunch. Again, we walked a short distance down a dusty dirt road to where the family lived, in one of the many dilapidated wooden shacks in the town. Lunch was delightful and the family was clearly sharing with us their kindest and most caring heart. Personally, I was deeply moved by all of the people that we met in the village of Diana. Having almost no material wealth, yet they offered us an enormous depth of loving heart. Very wonderful and remarkable!

After lunch, Mr. Sano made the decision to continue our visitation to yet another indigenous community. So, we sped north again for another hour on the Paraguay River, bringing us to Bahia Negra, the northernmost port in Paraguay. Here, we got off the boat to discover a small town-like area with dirt roads that was very sparsely populated. The first building we encountered

was the Paraguayan Naval Station, deliberately located in the most remote part of the country. A bright-spirited young man—a naval officer—emerged to greet us. It was clear that he was already a good friend of the Leda folks, and especially of Mr. Sano. He was so cheerful and good-humored that he immediately put us all at ease, so mutual introductions were quite spontaneous. After about 10 minutes, however, he needed to return to his duties, but invited us to explore the rest of the town.

We walked down the road about a quarter-mile and entered an elementary school building, where we were again happily greeted by a fresh-spirited lady who was the principal of the school. Again, Mr. Sano and others were long-time friends of the principal, and she was inspired to meet the Revs. Michael and Zena Sykes. For a short time, she invited us into her small office and introduced us to several of the teachers. It was, in any case, clear that the Leda Settlement had also made significant contributions to assure the well-being of this school, and the principal was extremely grateful to them and happy to receive their spontaneous visit. We departed from the school amidst a flurry of hugs and handshakes.

Our next stop in Bahia Negra was the only Catholic church in the town, which Revs. Michael and Zena Sykes had desired to visit. Once we had arrived there, we were welcomed by two of the three Catholic priests who had been assigned there only four months previously. The three priests were young men, probably in their thirties or forties, and hailed originally from California, Vietnam, and Indonesia, respectively. The two we shared with, from the U.S. and Vietnam, spoke very good English and so it was quite easy to communicate with them. They had been assigned to this very remote Catholic outpost which, for them, was a frontier that they were trying to feel confident about pioneering, but had not yet experienced any real victory in appealing to the indigenous folks.

Leaving behind our delightful sharing with these two priests, we again boarded the Good Go boat. Our final decision was to make a third visitation to an indigenous community named Esperanza, backtracking on the Paraguay River about two hours south of Bahia Negra. Esperanza's community appeared to be very similar to Diana's—with most of the houses standing as little more than makeshift wooden shacks, and with a visibly new school building, contributed by the Leda Settlement, in the center of town. Once again, we met the high-spirited teachers at the school, who regarded our arrival as something to be celebrated. They gathered all the school kids outside in a shaded area and Mr. Sano introduced the four of us in our two couples as reverends, asking Revs. Michael and Zena to say a few words. At that point we received notice that the village chief of Esperanza had invited us to visit his home, which was about a half-mile away on the central dirt road across town. The Chief, a well-groomed and seemingly articulate man—apparently better-off materially than most of the villagers—was extremely cordial to our Leda group and was especially uplifted to realize that ministers from the United States had come to visit his town.

We sat around in a circle in his backyard and engaged in lively sharing for about half an hour, until the setting sun reminded us that we would no doubt be traveling in the dark on the

Paraguay River and would probably not be getting back to Leda until 8:00 or 9:00 at night. We said farewell to the Chief and his lovely family, and quickly walked the half-mile back to the boat and took off.

Upon returning to Puerto Leda about 8:30 p.m., we were greeted by several vehicles with headlights blazing in the dark, and then were quickly driven over to the dining hall where dinner had been saved for us. During the meal, Mr. Nakata expressed his sincerest gratitude especially to Revs. Michael and Zena Sykes for their willingness to visit and investigate the Leda Project, and further declared his devout hope that they would indeed carry Father Moon's message to many other ministers and Christian communities in the United States. Clearly, Mr. Nakata felt that the Sykes' visitation to Leda was assuredly only the first of many such minister visitations to Leda that would happen in the future. Once we had finished our dinner, all of us headed back to our lodging quarters. Carol and I were visibly exhausted but, before I retired I took a relaxing shower, during which I discovered I had been accompanied by a tiny frog perched on the shower wall. We slept very deeply that night.

After breakfast on the morning of our seventh day, we went fishing on the Paraguay River, since this had also been a specific request of Rev. Michael Sykes. This was a great experience, during which Rev. Mike caught about six decent-sized Piranha (maybe six inches long, five inches high, and a half-inch wide) and I also caught five same-sized Piranha and a Dogfish that was at least two feet long. After each catch, the two Japanese fellows, who had guided us to our fishing spot, also took the Piranha off the hook and stored the catch in a separate, closed wooden compartment in the center of the boat. It turns out that Piranha, Pacu, and Dogfish are all good-eating fish, so these were all donated to Leda. Revs. Carol and Zena had boarded a different boat for fishing, since their plan was to return to Leda mid-morning and participate in horse-riding.

After lunch, however, it was finally time to depart from the Leda Settlement, with our next lodging planned for Jardim, Brazil. After Date (pronounced "Daw'tay"), one of the original Leda pioneers, invited our two couples to each plant a tree in an area behind our lodgings, Mr. Sano picked us up with our luggage in a truck and we drove the mile down to the port, where we boarded another speedboat for the next four-hour trip south down the Paraguay River.

Fortunately, these four hours passed quickly, bringing us to the port of Murтинho, which is part of the Brazilian state of Mato Grosso do Sul. Here we disembarked and were picked up in a van driven by a man whom Mr. Sano had contracted to transport us another four hours, this time across country on a well-paved road, to the city of Jardim. Again, this period transpired relatively quickly and, before we realized it, we had arrived at our hotel in Jardim. We checked in and Mr. Sano suggested that we go out and have something for dinner. After trying to follow several dubious sets of directions, we ended up at a nice restaurant, where we were able to dine in an outdoor plaza bathed in temperate breezes. Soon, however, we returned to the hotel and fell asleep.



We spent all of Day 8 in Brazil, visiting a number of locations. After our breakfast in the hotel, the Jardim Unification Church leader drove us for an hour out to the large property purchased by Father Moon in the 1990s. For Carol and I, this was our second experience of visiting this property—our first having been as a family in 1999. It was fascinating to once again see all the building that had been constructed to accommodate the families visiting from around the world in the 1990s. In particular, a Japanese sister who lived and

worked on the premises as a caretaker at True Parents' residence, and of the property in general, took all of us on a tour of a number of the buildings. In addition to True Parents' residence, we also visited two huge major lecture halls/auditoriums as well as some of the one-floor residential apartment buildings. It was clear, however, that due to the lack of available funds, many of these buildings had fallen into disrepair—though the abiding hope of the resident families there was that the future would be much brighter once the current property litigation was resolved. This resolution was expected by the end of 2016, after which the property could once again be utilized to bring large numbers of people for visitations and workshops.

Though the Jardim property offered wonderful visual perspectives of the surrounding landscapes, and though it still definitely held its spiritual mystique, we finally bade it farewell and headed back into Jardim city for a partial *rodízio* lunch, including a smorgasbord of other foods. From here, we drove a short ways to the local Unification Church center, where a number of members were actively preparing to participate in the Peace Road Jardim 2016 event—a three-mile collective bike-ride from Jardim to a nearby town, meant to honor the celebration of peace. Arriving at the downtown gathering location, we discovered a practicing elementary school marching band, and many young and a few older bicyclists. After the city mayor spoke at the opening ceremony, Revs. Michael and Zena Sykes were also asked to speak, and they gave a rousing, appreciative send-off to the event. So, in the ninety-degree heat, the marching band went first, playing for a short distance, followed by the cyclists. Then the cyclists went ahead and did not stop until they had completed the three-mile ride. The finishing point was a small town park, where many pictures were snapped, and hot dogs and drinks were distributed to all.

Leaving this celebration behind us, we collected our luggage once again, piled into two cars, and drove several hours along a well-paved road to arrive at Ponta Pora, Brazil. Here we had the chance to have a brief dinner at a pizza parlor. What was so interesting about this municipality of Ponta Pora was that it was seemingly directly joined with the city of Pedro Juan Caballero in Paraguay. This particular joining of two cities is referred to as a *conurbation*—i.e., two cities that have directly merged to form one continuous urban and industrially developed area—and so, there

is no marked boundary between the two cities, except for a division commonly designated by certain roads that people are generally aware of. So, after pizza, we drove from Brazil across the road into Paraguay, down the street and over to the major bus station in Pedro Juan Caballero. At 10:00 p.m., we boarded the bi-level, luxury bus for what we anticipated would be a seven-hour trip, arriving in Ciudad del Este, Paraguay about 6:30 a.m. I personally found it quite difficult to sleep on the bus, but Carol, the Sykes, and Mr. Sano had no problem and slept up until we arrived at our destination.

Day 9 of our trip then began with a very good-hearted man—one of the members of the Unification Church in Ciudad del Este (CDE)—picking us up at the bus station, and driving us across town to an upscale hotel, where we checked in and got our baggage moved into our rooms. CDE is the second largest city in Paraguay and lies in front of the Brazilian city of Foz do Iguacu. While these two cities are separated by the Paraná River, they are linked by the Friendship Bridge. In fact, because our plan on this day was to visit Iguazu Falls just across the Brazilian border, we were again picked up from the hotel and we then drove across the Friendship Bridge. In Foz do Iguacu, we boarded a tourist bus that drove us the 10 miles or so out to the area of the falls. However, our first stop entailed a walk through the famous exotic bird park (Parque das Aves), just across the street from the entrance to Iguazu Falls. We took many pictures of the incredibly beautiful and colorful exotic birds. It was a wonder-filled experience to view these extraordinary birds—flamingos, ostriches, owls, toucans, cassowaries, hummingbirds, parrots, and many more—all cared for and thriving in their natural habitats. In addition, one huge caged area contained many kinds of amazing butterflies.

The bird park tour was a wonderful experience. Once we then departed from this area, we walked across the street to buy tickets for the shuttle bus that would drive us out to the highest point above Iguazu Falls—a two-mile continuous expanse exhibiting over 280 separately distinguishable waterfalls—appropriately designated as one of the “new natural wonders of the world” in 2011 and as a UNESCO World Heritage Site. From this highest point, most tourists walk a mile or so down a paved, winding, gradually descending path along a mountainside, arriving finally at the bottom where they can walk out to a large raised viewing platform just at the edge of one of the massive waterfalls named “The Devil’s Throat.” This is an extraordinary position from which to snap photos and to contemplate the vast collective power of the falls, with 450,000 cubic feet of water per second cascading over the falls during the peak rainy season. Standing on this 20-foot by 20-foot platform, a person becomes completely drenched within a few minutes by the waterfalls’ spray, unless he or she is wearing a raincoat. To witness the spectacle of the unceasingly rainbow-misted Iguazu falls is a truly mind-blowing experience, which all five of us were grateful for and otherwise overwhelmed by.

Only the hardiest of souls endeavors to walk back up to the top of the mountain along the paved path. The vast majority of people simply board elevators near the bottom and are quickly transported to the top. From there, we caught another shuttle bus back to our point of origin where we had bought our tickets. Then we caught a local city bus that carried us back into the city center

of Foz do Iguacu and, after waiting another half-hour, we caught the next specific bus that drove us back across the Friendship Bridge into CDE. Just across the bridge, we were picked up by the same man who had retrieved us that morning from the bus station. He then drove us in his van to our hotel, where we showered and collapsed exhausted from the heat, dust and rigorous walking of the day. After a couple hours' rest, we all met downstairs for a very delectable dinner, finally retiring for the evening about 8:30 p.m.

After the hotel breakfast on Day 10, we piled back into the van for a third time. By now we had become fast friends with our local driver, who on this occasion had brought along his college-aged daughter. From CDE, we drove another four to five hours to Trinidad in order to tour the famous site of the Jesuit ruins. In particular, the Jesuits first sent "missioners" to Paraguay in 1586, after which time they established a number of missions throughout Paraguay and Argentina. The Jesuit mission of La Santisma Trinidad de Parana was built in 1712 and is known to be the biggest of all the missions in the region. In effect, the Jesuits first created their missions as towns in areas inhabited by the local native Indians—the Guarani, and they specifically undertook to create a written form of the Guarani language, which up to that time was not written. The towns served as centers, often for 2,000 to 3,000 indigenous Guarani, where the Jesuits could educate the Guarani about civilized notions of public order, social norms, and culture. Because the Guarani were originally and naturally polygamists, it was necessary, for instance, to inculcate the Christian idea of monogamous marriage, and to encourage a structured way of life based on this idea.

Once we had arrived at Trinidad, we quickly located the tourist access to the ruins, and a young woman was assigned as our guide. This was a fascinating walk-through of the grounds that featured a giant stone church with a massive stone pulpit straight ahead at the far end of the property, with a whole courtyard off to one side that included the Jesuits' lodgings and their local school, as well as an area dedicated to court proceedings for meting out justice to the indigenous denizens. In addition, the wide-open grounds at the front of the church were ringed, or bracketed, by massive stone lodgings or apartments for many of the compliant indigenous families, accommodating as many as 2,000 indigenous residents when full. These ruins of the Jesuit mission in Trinidad have also been designated as a UNESCO World Heritage Site, which seems very appropriate inasmuch as they truly captivate one's imagination in regard to the extraordinary early efforts put forth to expand Western civilization.

Once our tour had come to an end, we availed ourselves of the opportunity to have lunch at a small restaurant at the entrance to the ruins and then drove for another two hours to arrive at Encarnacion. Here we waited for another hour, finally boarding a second long-distance bus that was considerably less luxurious than the first cross-country bus we had taken two days before. Though somewhat ramshackle, this bus was quite fast and, instead of taking the full seven hours to reach Asuncion, it took only six and a half hours, arriving at 9:00 in the evening. Mr. Sano, however, was now inspired to suggest that it was not too late to have dinner and, before we knew it, taxis had dropped us off at a very nice Japanese restaurant, where most of us gobbled up deluxe sushi. Soon, we had all returned to our original hotel in Asuncion and fell fast asleep.

We spent the morning of our final day in Asuncion visiting some of the downtown areas where tourists can buy many different kinds of souvenirs. Our two couples wanted to bring a few gifts back home with us, and we bought these here, along with the gift of a stylish leather hat for Mr. Sano in appreciation of his excellent efforts to provide us with the best itinerary possible. Returning to the hotel, we gathered up our luggage for a final time and said our good-byes. Mr. Sano picked us up about noon and drove us to the airport, arriving at 2:00 p.m., and we boarded our plane flight home to the USA at 4:10 in the afternoon. We had shared an extraordinary trip across Paraguay and to the Leda Settlement, all masterminded by Mr. Sano!