

The Blessed Teens Academy Values “Action-Packed” Experience in New York City

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BTA student Miho Frankowsky helps man the Lovin' Life Ministries Life Lounge during and after Sunday Service.

The Blessed Teens Academy (BTA), an educational program for teen-aged Unificationist youth, closed its 2011-2012 school year with memorable series of events in the heart of New York City. The 40 students and the staff of the program stayed in the Lovin' Life Learning Center in Manhattan from June 13, 2012 until July 4, 2012, and during that time, had many opportunities to experience the love of True Parents and True Children.

Upon our arrival in the Big Apple, we underwent some culture shock, having come from practically the middle of nowhere in Blanco, Texas. Everything in New York was very fast-paced. However, we felt better after being welcomed by Loretta Schaufler, the housing manager for the Learning Center, and by Chef Jatoma Gavin.

Right away, we were assigned tasks for the 2012 Commencement Gala to be held at the prestigious Manhattan Center on June 15, 2012 as well as for BTA's tradition of having its students deliver end-of-the-year *Divine Principle* lectures. On the night of the Commencement Gala, many high school- and college graduates from the class of 2012 were honored and recognized, as well as graduates from programs such as Generation Peace Academy, Next Gen Academy, BTA and others. The Gala was extremely exciting. There was a wonderful keynote address by Rev. In Jin Moon, senior pastor of Lovin' Life Ministries (LLM). In her address, Rev. Moon talked about the importance of giving back and encouraged the youth to stand up for their beliefs. Members of BTA helped prepare and serve the food at the event. Entertainment included what the *Village Voice* called “Rev. Moon's Kickass Band,” Sonic Cult, and the evening concluded with exhilarating hours of ballroom dancing, during which brothers and sisters, parents and children danced in the most respectful way.



Soonmi Whedbee gives a Divine Principle lecture to the staff and other students of BTA.

The next day, we had another opportunity to help out with a LLM event. All 40 of us walked over to the Manhattan Center at 8:00 a.m. to assist in the production of the LLM Sunday Service. This particular Sunday was Father's Day. After Rev. In Jin Moon's lovely sermon, everyone participated in a ballroom dance class taught by Ariana Moon and her father, Dr. Jin Sung Park. After ballroom, we were invited to dinner at the Tic Toc Diner in the New Yorker Hotel and then watch the movie, *Prometheus*, together with the True Family. It was a memorable Father's Day.

Having the opportunity to experience what it's like to be part of LLM was unforgettable. During the two weeks that we were in New York, all the staff and students of BTA were able to help out with the

preparations for LLM Sunday Service three times. Some helped with ushering and greetings of guests while others manned the LLM's Life Lounge Café and merchandise tables. Most of all, everyone felt so fortunate to be able to hear the senior pastor's sermons live!



Kaz Tranberg delivers a Divine Principle lecture as well.

Over the next two weeks, Ariana Moon and her father took much time out of their busy schedules to teach us a Waltz- and Swing routine they had choreographed. Second-generation Unificationists Eika Davis and Michael Roman, co-instructors of the LLM Ballroom Dance Ministry, also invested many hours into us. Both routines were very challenging, but we worked hard every day to try to master them. We were able to perform the Swing routine at both the 30th Anniversary Gala on July 1, which celebrated those who had participated in the Blessing Ceremonies in 1982, and the Fourth-of-July Party. Dr. Park met us almost every day for practice, and Ariana spent hours training us and helping us perfect our postures and moves. We felt embraced and cared for by the True Children and True Family.

Dr. Park took so much time with us to share about True Parents and True Children through his own life experiences with them. Without exception, we felt that these sharings were faith-deepening. It allowed us to touch and be touched by True Parents and their children. He spoke in depth about building a culture of "Heart of Attendance," which left all of us in deep and sincere thought of how to become our true selves. He went all out to share with us Rev. In Jin Moon's love for young Unificationists like us.

From day to day, the staff members of BTA decided to keep their schedules open, because there was always the possibility to spend time with True Family. One wonderful experience was dinner with Dr. Park, who on behalf of Rev. In Jin Moon took us to a Korean restaurant. That time was truly precious, and everyone got to taste authentic Korean dishes such as *Kalbee* and *Kalbee Jim*. Following the meal, we participated in a session of Karaoke and then retired for the night with bright spirits. On another occasion, Rev. In Jin Moon invited us to attend the Broadway musical *Phantom of the Opera* together with others from the local area. The show was phenomenal. Afterwards, people commented how they were blown away by the professional opera singers and actors.



BTA students and staff practice a Swing-dance routine, which they performed several times during their time in New York City, at the Lovin' Life Learning Center.

As mentioned earlier, another major event we attended was the 30th Anniversary Gala on July 1, 2012. That morning, we helped the LLM production team set up for Sunday Service as usual, as well as clean up the Hammerstein Ballroom to prepare it for the banquet. After a quickly set up, we rushed upstairs to the Grand Ballroom to participate in the ballroom-dance class. The room was filled with not only couples and families who had come to attend the Gala but also more than 100 participants from Lovin' Life Summer Camp, which launched that day. The banquet itself was a beautiful tribute to the couples who were Blessed in marriage by Rev. and Mrs. Sun Myung Moon, our True Parents, in 1982. Entertainment for the evening included several ballroom-dance performances: a Waltz-, Foxtrot-, Chacha- routine followed by BTA's performances of the Swing routine we had been practicing. The performances were inspiring and received rousing applause from the audience. Entertainment gave way to a night of social

dancing during which we went into the audience and asked either our parents or another adult there to dance. The floor was crowded with both the young and the young at heart, and all had bright, shining faces. After the dancing portion, Sonic Cult ended the night with a bang.



The graduating class of 2011-2012 celebrated the end of their school year at the Lovin' Life Learning Center.

The last event we attended was the spectacular Fourth-of-July celebration. There was delicious food, fabulous dancing, exciting video games and breathtaking fireworks, but by far the most memorable part for us was the surprise appearance of Rev. In Jin Moon. She took the time out to greet in person each of the new participants of the Lovin' Life Leadership Program and watch the fireworks together with everyone. We were deeply moved to be able to see her up close, and some commented that it felt like a "family experience."



Left to right: BTA sisters Mijin, Morgan Gaines, Soonmi Whedbee and Mina Okamoto.

This event signaled the end of an extremely action-packed LLM experience in New York City. It also signaled the end to another exciting school year as part of BTA. The experience was phenomenal, and we all felt blessed to have been able to witness the love of our wonderful Senior Pastor Rev. In Jin Moon firsthand. We felt blessed to have her leading the way for the movement in the United States, during this Settlement Era. One BTA student said, "There have never been such opportunities and blessings such as the ones we experienced. Not until Rev. In Jin Moon stood up and said, 'Our second-generation need to be loved and cared for, not by the world and society around them, but by True Parent's culture and society.' Rev. In Jin Moon has brought the heart of our True Parents to the American Movement as a True Child."



From left to right: Kenta, Nolan Ichinohe and Mina Okamoto during the Commencement Gala.