

Unification Church Buys the New Yorker Hotel as Its World Mission Headquarters

Neil Salonen
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The Unification Church took New York by surprise with our May 13 purchase of the 42-story, 2,000-room New Yorker Hotel now the Unification Church World Mission Headquarters. At Eighth Avenue and 34th Street, the hotel overlooks Madison Square Garden. Each of the nearly 2,000 guest rooms has a private bath; many are furnished with beds, dresser, and TV set. The hotel has three levels of basements, three ballrooms, and several restaurants, now vacant.

The location is strategic. 34th Street is a major east-west thoroughfare through Manhattan, running to the Lincoln Tunnel to the west and the Queens Midtown tunnel to the east. Penn Station, a major Post Office, and Macy's department store are each about a block away. Eighth Avenue is a "transitional" area. Once thriving, it is being taken over by bars and pornographic activities, particularly between 42nd and 50th streets. The New Yorker is south of this zone.

The declining fortune of the area was a major factor of our purchase. Shortly after his return from Korea in March, Rev. Moon expressed his desire that the Church purchase a large hotel in a declining midtown area. The New Yorker was

turned up in the search. Built in 1929, it was forty years a prestigious hotel, "one of the city's most popular hotels for tourists and visiting garment district buyers," said the New York Post. It declared bankruptcy in 1972. But the hotel remained vacant, partly due to a complication about its name. It was sold for \$8.8 million to the French Polyclinic Medical School and Health Center, which also declared bankruptcy in 1974. The New Yorker Corporation has been trying to sell it ever since. Due to the area's decline and the prolonged vacancy, we bought the hotel for about five million dollars; it would cost \$80 million to build a comparable building today, said Col. Pak.

On the evening of May 12th, Rev. Moon, Col. Pak, and over 100 Church leaders anxiously awaited the outcome of the closing at Belvedere. Shortly after 8 pm, Mr. Salonen arrived with the final contract. After Rev. Moon saw it, he signed various documents, including several large architectural renderings of the building. In commemoration of the occasion, he signed photographs of the hotel for those present.

Col. Pak spoke of the significance of the purchase. "Rev. Moon has selected a gigantic building for us, a heavenly pyramid. This great building has been lying idle in the heart of New York City. This is where we can make a dramatic showcase of what Reverend Moon can do. We will rejuvenate the building both spiritually and physically. Soon the whole standard of the area will be upgraded. Here we can succeed in the resurrection, both physical and spiritual. In the last year alone, New York lost over 600,000 residents.

Reverend Moon will be the first one to spearhead confidence and trust in the city. He is putting faith in the city while everyone else is running away. This means a great deal to New York; the citizens will be very appreciative. Right now, all the religious people are trying to run away from the sins of the world. But instead of running away from sin, we are to conquer sin. This is the spirit of God and Jesus Christ. Unless you confront sin, how can you liquidate it?"

In explaining Rev. Moon's intended purposes for the building, Col. Pak said, "We are going to use the building as an international headquarters. The word 'mission' is emphasized. We have purchased it for the mission of bringing down the Kingdom." In that connection, he said, the money for its purchase was from the international branches of the Unification Church. Secondly, Rev. Moon wants to make the hotel a center for cultural activities. "Third, he has a plan to set aside some areas for public service, especially to educate the world's young people. We, ill house young people from all over the world while they study in their fields at their respective schools in New York: Columbia, Juilliard, etc. This will be a true human resources development program."

Mr. Salonen made the public announcement of our purchase at a press conference on Thursday morning, May 13. "I am very proud to announce today that we have completed negotiations for the purchase of the New Yorker Hotel. The signing was the beginning of a very dramatic program on our part." He stressed our goal of moral regeneration: "We feel very strongly that what is needed in America is to rebuild the spirit of giving God thanks for the blessings that He has given to this country and also to rededicate ourselves to the spiritual values that have brought so much to this nation. As part of that, we feel that since New York typifies the problems that our society is facing, we want to begin our clean up here. That is why we started the America the Beautiful campaign.

"We realize that New York is a city that needs a restoration in confidence. We want to help rebuild faith in the city of New York, particularly in the areas that have declined not only physically and economically but morally as well. Therefore, our purchase of the New Yorker Hotel is not just an effort to bring the commitment of business and commerce back to the city, but also to begin cleaning up that area. From the programs that we intend to launch from that building, we expect the entire Eighth Avenue area to come back. We are going to do a moral cleanup as well. We are appalled to see the number of prostitutes on the streets, the tremendous number of pornographic bookstores. We feel that what is needed is greater citizen participation. We intend to do this. We want to work together to help New York again become a symbol of prosperity and vitality here in America."

Mr. Salonen went on to outline the purposes of the building: "We plan to devote a number of our rooms to public service work; in particular, an education program of bringing men and women from around the world to study here in New York. We will provide them scholarships, room, board, and the best possible training for them in the field of their choice. We will also provide them with a strong moral background so that they can go back and become not just technically qualified leaders of the world but also morally excellent leaders. In this way, we are going to promote the ideals of international brotherhood and cooperation.

"It is our desire to restore the entire area. It will become not only a world mission center for Unification Church activities but it will also interface with many cultural programs. As you know, we believe that cultural exchange can help accomplish the goal of world peace and brotherhood.... We will also seek to cooperate with other groups who are looking for a place for their programs."

"Reverend Moon has a great dream for reviving the spirit of New York and of America," said Mr. Salonen. "It is a great day for us to announce that a great step has been taken by securing this property. We desire to make this building a new temple of God in the city of New York. We want this to be one place which will really represent God's hope for New York."