

## 2100 Couples are Wed at Madison Square Garden in New York City

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Of course there is always a lot of excitement generated by a wedding and ours was certainly no exception. It was to be a huge event - not only anticipated by our families and friends outside the church with mixed emotions, but also by those of us involved in the planning and actually participating as blessing candidates.

Rumors had flown for years and suddenly it was going to really happen. The Blessing Committee was actually meeting. The contract with Madison Square Garden was signed. A dress pattern was chosen. Forms were flying from one end of the country to the other.



The fourth floor at the World Mission Center became the hub of all activity. Phones were installed and

immediately were ringing from early morning to late at night. There was an incredible amount to be done. The World Mission Center had to be made ready not only for the Blessing but also for a matching which would take place a little more than one week before the Blessing. Volunteers to carry out plans from each of the committees were recruited and put to work. Decorations for Madison Square Garden were planned and ordered. The Wedding Booklet was planned, written, and sent off to the publisher.

Entertainment for the evening was planned and arrangements were made for guest artists to perform. Performing Arts went into rehearsal. Some members of the Korean Folk Ballet went to 113 Street to help make wedding veils for all the brides to wear.

Rings were ordered. I. D. cards and a variety of forms were processed. Meetings for already engaged couples and matching candidates were held. Questions and problems and concerns were fielded by the Blessing Committee almost constantly. Counseling was arranged for those who desired it.

Security for all the participants and the True Parents was a concern and a committee went to work on that. The media would certainly want to cover this event and a whole staff of people were made busy arranging press conferences, a media breakfast, sending press releases, and in general setting up agreeable arrangements for the worldwide media to cover what *came* to be known in the press as the "mega-wedding."



*Rehearsal*

A computer was enlisted to help plan the great procession of brides and grooms. Lists of guests to be invited were compiled and tickets for the blessing and evening entertainment were distributed. These and many, many more external preparations were accomplished through the cooperation of so many people, all brothers and sisters working to help other brothers and sisters take a new step in their commitment to the principled life and in God's will for His creation.

Reflecting back over the blessing, several people expressed their hearts regarding this event:

"The whole blessing became much more fantastic," said Mr. Ken Sudo. "I never thought ten or fifteen years ago that there would be a blessing at Madison Square Garden. It was so organized. Also the public came to understand and appreciate it, and that's wonderful. This shows that Father's victory is going on."

As one person who worked on the organizational aspects, Keith Cooperrider said of the blessing, "It was amazing." He negotiated the contract with Madison Square Garden and was responsible for the flow of brides and grooms into Madison Square Garden during the rehearsal and actual ceremony. He found out later that some high schools practice for their graduations involving only 1,000 people for months before

the event. We had more than 4,000 involved and only had half a day to practice.

"I was inspired to see cooperation even in spite of difficult situations. In Korea for the 1800 couples' Blessing, everyone was lined up in a parking lot. We didn't have anything like that. It had to be, much more carefully done here."

What were some of his reflections?

"It was a renewal experience to think about our own marriage and see where we are seven years later. It was good to see these young couples making the same journey we had traveled. After seven years you tend to get a bit crusty and it's good to throw it off and have a fresh outlook again."

One of the couples that took part in the blessing, John and Helen Abelseth, were very excited about being married in this fashion. "It was worth every second," said John. "The wait, the anxiety, questions, challenges -- everything will become a memory." Helen added, "My first impression was that I am losing my freedom, but I know I've found a whole new freedom." John continued, "It's a joyous time but also very serious. We have to think on a more responsible level now."



*Rehearsal: Left to right - Keith Cooperrider, Chung Hwan Kwak, Bo Hi Pak and Neil Salonen*

Among the bridesmaids and groomsmen who stood on both sides of the processional aisle to symbolize the entrance gate to the heavenly state of matrimony were Bob and Rhonda Schmitt. Rhonda reflected, "Our blessing was so small with only 35 couples. It was more intimate, with Father and Mother so close. Yet this blessing was so full of excitement and ceremony." Bob added, "The thing that impressed me was now this blessing was unique. It did not just symbolize a fulfillment of a time requirement or anything like that. Father could do it any time or any place. Given that, in observing the people I saw, I had an overwhelming feeling of Father's forgiveness and love. It seemed that people before had achieved some sort of spiritual milestones. But this time Father. represented the essence, the embodiment of God's love. Father wanted to encourage people to feel hope and feel close to him. It felt different than the blessings of the past. It was a good thing. I felt the hope of God centered on families. We can all feel closer to father because of the blessing."

Bob concluded with some advice to the newly blessed couples: "You're going to face realities that you've never faced before. You will see economic, physical and spiritual hardships in having children. But. never be discouraged or lose faith. It's easy to get lost in physical realities and to feel jealous of people outside. Never forget the love that Father has for you and that you have for Father."