

Clifton, NJ Family Church Forum Questions Six Second Generation Panelists

Naria McGee
February 3, 2017



Ever wonder why second generation Unificationist youth and young adults sometimes don't come to church, what they think about the movement they were born into, and what their understanding is about True Parents' teachings? There were many in our local New Jersey church community who were wondering these kinds of things, and they wanted to know, "What are second generation Unificationists' thoughts and opinions?"

On February 3, 2017, the Clifton Family Church Young Adult In-reach Committee put together a Young Adult Forum for community members 16 years and older, both elder and younger generations, to ask questions of six second generation panelists in their 20s and 30s. The panelists were Kuni Nishimura, Neil Rischl, Laurel Nakai, Mija Maldonado, Elizabeth LaGrotteria, and Hero Hernandez. Some are single, some recently Blessed, and others already have children.

Community members wrote down their questions on index cards, and the facilitators sorted the cards by category. Each panelist introduced himself or herself and explained their present situation, then the groups of questions were presented to the panelists for their response. Some of the questions were "What is the biggest reality check the church needs?" "What is the most valuable thing our church offers?" and "What do you think about Divine Principle education for second generation Unificationists?"

The panelists spoke honestly from their own personal perspectives and experiences. The incredibly honest and sometimes blunt answers were eye-opening, and made it clearer about the reality our next generation are facing and where they stand in our movement. Even the second generation Unificationists attending appreciated hearing from their elders and peers and learning they were not the only ones thinking this way. There were many questions and topics, and we did not get through all of them, but it was a first step to creating a better understanding between generations.

The panel was followed by discussions by group. Each person explained who they are, their thoughts on the event and other things they would like to hear discussed. Through a feedback survey, many expressed that they enjoyed the honesty and openness of the panel and offered their opinion that more of these kinds of events should be done, maybe with a mixture of first and second generation Unificationists as panelists. The second generation panel said that they appreciated that the community listened without any confrontation.

The Young Adult Forum was initiated based on the results from a local Project Phoenix event held in New Jersey as well as the desire to hear more from the younger generation. The Young Adult In-reach Committee was created through a proposal last year by Christl Brunkhorst, an elder of our community. The committee members were Joe Leonard, Zeth Bell, Atsushi Takino, Branch and Naria Gaarder, and Jin Kwon Kim, a mixture of first and second generation who want to create a closer, family-like warmth and support within our church community.

The goal for the forum was not to ask for solutions to problems, but to hear about people's experiences. The committee was not looking to investigate what went wrong, or what was wrong, but for people to hear different perspectives, not to point fingers or cast blame. Simply listening and understanding someone's situation is important for any community. We often are afraid to talk about our difficulties with each other because of the fear of being judged and accused, so just being listened to can be incredibly powerful.