

FFWPU UK: 8,000 Couples Marry In Unification Church Blessing Ceremony

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Photos from the Las Vegas Blessing Ceremony

Around the world, 8,000 couples of the Unificationist faith community offered their marriages and future families to God during the Holy Marriage Blessing Ceremony. Standing alongside their peers, family and friend, the couples vowed "to become a couple for eternity and build ideal families."

For Yujin A., one of the young brides at the Las Vegas ceremony, that commitment is for a larger vision. "It's not just one day or one moment. This is an eternal commitment you are making," says Yujin. "Having the right intentions in terms of what you want to go into and realizing that you are doing it for something that's bigger than yourself. That motivation can help you with your eternal commitment with each other."



A total of 8,000 couples simultaneously attended the main ceremony in Gapyeong, South Korea and in other ceremonies around the world. In Europe, ceremonies were held in Tirana, Albania and Stuttgart, Germany.

As core tenants of the Unificationist faith, abstinence from sex before marriage and not dating are highly encouraged in the youth to help prepare them for receiving the Holy Marriage Blessing later in life. However, over the last few years, there has been a steady rise in couples from "non-traditional" backgrounds choosing to participate in the Holy Marriage Blessing Ceremony, such as previously divorced couples who are re-marrying or those who were distant from the faith community before. It is a testament to the redemptive power of this sacrament.



Some people who grew up in the church have chosen to date outside of the Unificationist faith community but found that they were dissatisfied with the quality of those relationships. They later chose to find a life partner within the faith, because of shared values and the Holy Marriage Blessing's emphasis on commitment.

"I explored dating outside of the movement," says Jamie C., a groom at the Las Vegas ceremony. "Dating was a game with a lot of unspoken rules. It took a lot of time to really have deeper conversations and to talk about values, hopes and expectations in life with whoever it is you're seeing. The amount of depth that you gain from a relationship, from this [Blessing] process is so much faster and so much more intentional than traditional dating."

Many of the young couples in Saturday's ceremony are children of Unificationist members who also received the Holy Marriage Blessing decades ago. Inspired by their parents' commitment grounded in faith, a new generation is inheriting the tradition of marrying not just for themselves, but for the sake of building God's family. A large number of couples go through a family guided, intentional engagement process before committing to the Holy Marriage Blessing.

"It wasn't just our parents that helped us. We also had many friends and supporters that helped us get to where we are," shares Kentoku K., another young groom. "I think that being part of the Blessing Ceremony is like a culmination of their hearts and investments and efforts. We want to be able to honour that with this Blessing Ceremony."

Dr. Hak Ja Han Moon, the leader of the global Unificationist faith community, officiated the ceremony. Her benediction prayer to God over the thousands of newlyweds asked that "All the 8,000 couples receiving the Blessing today...grow as Blessed Couples that [God] can take pride in."

Mother Moon, often referred to as "the Mother of Peace," is one of the few female leaders of a global religious movement. Her leadership style of the Unification movement for the past 11 years has been different from her husband's 58 years at the movement's forefront, but no less effective. She commands the respect of current and former heads of state and international civic leaders, including Ban Ki-Moon and Waris Dirie. Although a religious leader, her influence has touched society at large through the

hundreds of charitable organisations and projects founded across industries, including culture and arts, education, business, sports, and philanthropy.



The Holy Marriage Blessing has been at the forefront of cultural diversification in the U.S. Cross-cultural marriage was fairly uncommon for most of American history, even as a nation that has long been considered a "melting pot" of diversity. After the Supreme Court decision in *Loving vs. Virginia* (1967) passed, interracial marriages began to steadily rise over the next decades. While there are multiple factors that contribute to the occurrences of cross-cultural marriage, such as overseas military postings or changes in legal precedent, the "Unification Church's" intercultural and interracial mass weddings have been a major contributing factor in destigmatizing cross-cultural marriage. Even racially homogeneous nations such as Korea are now seeing cross-cultural marriages on the rise.

The long-standing tradition of the Holy Marriage Blessing dates back to 1960, with the marriage of the Rev. Dr. Sun Myung Moon and Dr. Hak Ja Han Moon, co-founders of the Family Federation for World Peace and Unification, colloquially known as the "Unification Church." They have since blessed millions of couples in marriage for the sake of world peace. Unificationists around the world are proud of the impact the Marriage Blessing has had in bringing about cultural, racial, and religious unity, none more so than the couples participating in Saturday's ceremony.