

Unification Church USA Undertakes Unprecedented Media Outreach Campaign

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March 15, 2012

The Unification Church USA is leading an unprecedented media campaign prior to the Blessing ceremony in the United States on March 23, 2012. The Public Affairs department, led by Douglas Burton and Ariana Moon and assisted by interns from the Generation Peace Academy (GPA), has produced press kits to be used by District Pastors at media events a week prior to the Blessing. The media events are at the discretion of the District Pastors, and will take place in those districts where the candidates and the local clergy agree to support the events.



The press conference at the New Yorker Hotel for the Marriage Blessing event took place on March 12, 2012.

“Every year, the Marriage Blessing is the best opportunity for the church to get its story to a broader public,” said Douglas Burton, the public affairs director for the Unification Church USA. He continued, “Our arranged marriages of are one of our best kept secrets. When the reporters and editors meet and interview our members coming back from a Blessing, their stories have been positive in every way. This year, we are making an unprecedented effort to bring the story to the local press before the event. Even if there is no coverage, we will educate our local constituency and our allies in the clergy, and we will open up a line of communication with local editors. Finally, the publicity events will be an opportunity for celebration, creativity and fun at the local level.”

On March 12, 2012, the church held its first professional press conference at the New Yorker Hotel since the beginning of Lovin’ Life Ministries. Speakers at the conference, which was titled “Why Arranged Marriages Work,” included widely-quoted psychologist Dr. Robert Epstein, the former editor-in-chief of *Psychology Today*, Rev. Luonne Abram Rouse of the United Methodist Church, Director of the Blessed Family Ministry USA Rev. Phillip Schanker and candidates for the March 23rd Marriage Blessing. Similar press conferences will take place in Washington D.C., Detroit, Chicago as well as Los Angeles.

"I've presented two studies on arranged marriage at recent meetings of the National Council on Family Relations, involving more than 50 people from 10 different cultures and of six different faiths," stated Dr. Epstein. "I've focused mainly on how love sometimes emerges and grows stronger over time in arranged marriages. My research, which I've been conducting since 2003, suggests that arranged marriage in the Unification Church works as well as other arranged marriages and certainly far better on average than mainstream marriages in the U.S. With mainstream Hollywood-inspired marriages failing so badly in the U.S., I think we need to take a close look at other, more successful models for marriage. Unification Church and other arranged marriages can begin to teach us about the possibility of creating marriages in which two committed people work together over time to create stronger bonds - to build a love that gets deeper over the years."

“The fruits of our efforts to reach media are already evident,” said Burton. “We already have the commitment of a national news agency to cover our Marriage Blessing event over the next few weeks and we have video segments of Dr. Epstein and the participants that have been sent out nationwide to use in press events.”



MARRIAGE MODEL COMPARISONS

Arranged Marriage Model South Korea	Western Marriage Model Western
<p>One experiences with their plans and makes the final choice.</p> <p>One finds a partner to marry.</p> <p>One usually finds a partner to marry through a family member or friend.</p> <p>There is an ability to make a full personal commitment prior to the wedding ceremony.</p> <p>One finds a partner to marry through a family member or friend.</p> <p>There is an ability to make a full personal commitment prior to the wedding ceremony.</p> <p>One is married by their own choosing.</p>	<p>One is often married to someone they do not know or do not know well.</p> <p>A partner is chosen to marry to please the family or to please the individual.</p> <p>The focus is on the individual rather than the family.</p> <p>One is married to a full partner.</p> <p>One is married to a full partner.</p> <p>One is married to a full partner.</p> <p>One is married to a full partner.</p> <p>One is married to a full partner.</p> <p>One is married to a full partner.</p>

Sample pages of the press kit prepared by Douglas Burton and Ariana Moon for the Marriage Blessing.

“The value of this campaign is that for the first time, we’re really acknowledging the core value of our movement, centered on the Blessing,” said Rev. David Rendel, Chief of Operations of the Unification Church USA. “We are celebrating the great results that we have experienced through focusing on second-generation and newly Blessed couples who are dedicating their futures to a concept of a God-centered family. Taking a position where we are on the offensive rather than the defensive in terms of facing the media can lead to great momentum as we go forward in trying to bring more people into an understanding of how God wants to bless all families.”

Rendel continued: “I think the media campaign is an incredible start. Honestly, through this campaign we’ve witnessed the resistance we have to change in our movement. By shying from the media, we’ve essentially been undervaluing the great blessing we’ve been given to be a part of this movement, but the media campaign provides a great way for us to acknowledge that blessing.”

“I’m really excited about this initiative because it think it helps not only the media to understand the value of the Blessing and what our church has to give to the world, but it also enables our members to understand how they can articulate that to their friends and communities,” said Heather Thalheimer, director of Education at Lovin’ Life Ministries. “I know every member of our church wants to share the breaking news and the beauty of the Blessing, but we don’t know how to always say it. Now, the press kit prepared by Doug and Ariana helps us do so.”

“What’s new about media outreach this year is that it is deliberately conceived to support membership growth nationwide,” said Burton. “It is not exclusively for the purpose of raising the public image of individuals or the church as a whole, but it is intended to promote the opportunities of joining the Lovin’ Life communities in 2012. If done properly, outreach events can support the witnessing initiative of International President of the Unification Church Rev. Hyung Jin Moon.”

After couples return from the Marriage Blessing, the media outreach will continue for some weeks. The GPA graduates of the Leadership Module have been encouraged to continue as volunteer contributors to the Public Affairs department from their home cities after their year of service work.