

# The Washington Post

## Commentary: Why I'm retracing the journey of the Rev. Sun Myung Moon

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In February 1965, the man I later came to recognize as my Messiah and spiritual father came to America for the first time.

Having been freed from certain death in a North Korean gulag by U.S. armed forces, he wanted to see the land of his liberators for himself.

Landing in San Francisco just a couple of years ahead of the Summer of Love, he committed himself to tour the entire continental United States in just six short weeks, a road trip of 10,000 miles in a bright blue '65 Plymouth Fury station wagon. Visiting up to six states a day, his plan was to visit every state and plant a "Holy Ground," a place for meditation and prayers for peace.

In each, he buried a cache of soil and stones from his native Korea, at that time still recovering from the ravages of war and civil conflict, and prayed for the day when all nations and all people would become one.

By the end of the tour, 43 days and three oil changes later, he had come to the realization that if his movement were to have any hope of achieving the lofty goal of the unification of all religions, he would need to move his base of operations to the United States.

The tour thus became the first step toward planting a religious movement that, by the 1970s, had become one of the best known — and controversial — of all the many new faith communities that arrived on American soil during that tumultuous decade.

Two years ago, in September 2012, the Rev. Sun Myung Moon embarked on his final journey, dying at the age of 92 at his home in the mountains outside of Seoul. With his departure, many people inside and outside the Unification movement wondered aloud if it could long survive the loss of its founder.

As president of the Unification Church (Holy Spirit Association) of America, I wondered, too.

I was born in Nigeria, educated in England, and began my own spiritual journey in California while on vacation in the summer of 1976.

I've spent most of the last 40 years teaching and preaching the Rev. Moon's message in Europe, Russia, Asia and America.

This summer, I'm taking to the road with 50 fellow Unificationists to follow — literally — in the Rev. Moon's first footsteps, driving the same roads and finding out for myself how his movement is doing.

Along the way I'll be talking to Americans I meet at public parks, and city halls. I'll ask, "How has America changed since the Summer of Love? What is still the same? Is our nation on the right track?"

Starting in San Francisco, I'll meet the first American Unification Church president, now 78 years old.

In New Mexico, I'll have a conversation with a recently retired state senator who managed to succeed in politics while never disavowing his Unificationist faith.

And in Alabama, I'll eat dinner with a lifelong Unificationist who was recently elected mayor of his town at the center of the Bible Belt.

Along the route I'll meet hundreds of children and grandchildren of couples blessed by the Rev. and Mrs. Moon in 1982 at a mass wedding of 2,075 couples at New York's Madison Square Garden, perhaps the defining social event in the American Unification movement's first half century.

Visiting all 50 states will afford me an opportunity to see how our community is holding up to the passage of time. Some of our churches have survived natural disasters such as hurricanes, floods, tornadoes, as well as more human influences such as urban blight and the effects of unemployment. I'll also attempt to map the changing political, social and economic landscape of America, at least as it applies to our Unificationist corner of this great nation.

With access to recently discovered archival material, journals, photos and early 8 mm film footage, our tour group will document the first half-century of one of the best-known new religious movements in America.

We hope to remember, revive and reimagine the message that God called the Rev. Moon to bring to this country: America is God's hope.

Join me online this summer as I blog my explorations of this country through the eyes of the best man I have ever known, and in the process rediscover for myself God's hope for America.

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Michael Balcomb, president of the Unification Church, will begin a 48-state bus tour in San Francisco on June 22 and continue it through Aug. 3.