

## God's Hope for America Bus Tour - Day 14 – America the Beautiful

Michael Balcomb

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There is something distinctly peaceful, positive and active about Alabama that can't be felt anywhere else in the United States. Whether it's the strength of spirit that enabled Alabamians to rebuild after Hurricane Katrina or the constant flow of water throughout the state, Alabama gave the participants of the God's Hope for America tour a most memorable Fourth of July on the 13th day of their tour.

The day started in Gulfport, Mississippi, as some local truck drivers helped driver Paul Vetterli wash the tour bus while convivially exclaiming that the water was "holy." On the bus, the participants sang "I'll Never Leave You Anymore" and read aloud Bishop Ki Hoon Kim's words about True Father's challenges on his original 1965 tour of America, eating humble meals and driving long hours from state to state. When the travelers arrived at the Mobile, Alabama, Holy Ground, they received a red-carpet welcome from 30 local Alabamians and a huge U.S. flag.

Mr. Charles Wood, 94, president of the Japanese Garden Foundation in Mobile, gave the visitors a tour of the Japanese Garden where the Holy Ground is located. He had worked for two decades to create the Japanese Garden, transforming a former fish hatchery. By the day's end, Mr. Wood realized that True Father had blessed not only the area of that one tree central to the Holy Ground but also the whole garden. He saw "the other trees standing like tall columns all around the central tree," like the ancient columns he had seen near the Vatican while on a visit to Rome.

The local members recalled that True Parents made nine visits to Alabama, and that Unificationists spent the last 35 years breaking through Alabamian prejudices with success.

During the Holy Ground ceremony Japanese sisters sang "Shall We Gather by the River" in Japanese and English. Steven Wilson offered a tearful opening prayer, and emcee Terry Yamane gave a history of the Holy Grounds established around the United States. The song "America the Beautiful" was led by Evangelist Loretta Handy-Jackson, a former singer with the band of the late Otis Redding. She met our movement in 1997 and has been a friend and outspoken supporter of True Parents, both personally and from the pulpit of her large church in Chickasaw, Alabama, ever since.

Amazing testimonies about how True Father touched the lives of people in Alabama were given by Pastor Terry Yamane, Evangelist Loretta Handy-Jackson, longtime Bayou La Batre residents Nancy McCall and David Carnrike, and Brett Dungan, a Unificationist who is the mayor of Bayou La Batre.

Terry shared about the late Rev. Paul Werner, whom True Father asked to pioneer Bayou La Batre. Paul passed away on this date, and many there said they could feel his presence with them. Terry also recalled how, in December 1978, the clannish culture of Alabama led some locals to threaten seven Unificationists with shotguns until a group of African-American ministers stood by them and protected them. Alabama is a clan-driven state, Terry said, and you are welcome if people know your clan, so the members created their own “clan” by opening a grade school where young Unificationists went to school together.

Sister Loretta made up her mind not to believe what people said about True Father; instead she made the effort to meet him in person. What she found was a humble, loving man who came for the people and not for himself, and she loved him for that and how he dealt with people.

David Carnrike said that True Father “taught an old bigot what love is.” David said he had earned three doctorates by the time he met True Father and then completed a degree in theology, but he didn’t know what love is. He called himself the “educated idiot,” and when others were hating True Father back in the 1970s, David was learning to love.

After the event, the tour participants drove through Irvington, Alabama, where many Unificationists live, honking as they drove by their homes. They then visited Master Marine and the International Oceanic Enterprises (IOE), where the air smelled like shrimp and salt. The Bayou La Batre Family Church hosted lunch, with musical entertainment from the Moraes family, a video featuring True Parents in Alabama, and before-and-after photos of all the couples living there. Dr. Michael Balcomb, the FFWPU USA president, challenged every Unificationist to find one more person this year to whom to teach Divine Principle.

Some afternoon fireworks sent the travelers on their way to Tallahassee, Florida. That evening, seven new road-trippers joined the bus, including two senators, an evangelist and a guest from Atlanta, Georgia.

Mobile, Alabama Photo Gallery on Facebook

[<https://www.facebook.com/media/set/?set=a.855708481125580.1073741849.833527253343703&type=1>]. As with the God’s Hope for America page on Facebook, you can tag your friends in pictures and share the posts to help spread the word online as the bus spreads the word on the road! Come back tomorrow to hear about the rest of the Cajun mini tour, including Little Rock, Jackson and New Orleans!