

God's Hope for America Bus Tour's journey into the Deep South

Michael Balcomb
July 11, 2014



The God's Hope for America bus arrives in Tampa, Florida

The journey into the Deep South from July 5 to 7 brought showers and storms, but didn't dampen spirits at the God's Hope for America pilgrimage.

Tampa, Florida

With fresh, new road-trippers on the bus came singing and high spirits. New passenger Donzella James, a Georgia state senator, shared about her experience with True Parents and how she has come to understand God better through her experience with the Unification faith.



People gather at the Tampa Holy Ground to pray.

Approximately 70 people gathered at the Tampa Holy Ground—one of two Holy Grounds in the state of Florida—which is located just outside the Lowry Park Zoo. A letter of welcome and solidarity was read by Archbishop Roberto Toca of the Catholic Church of the Antiochian Rite, who also testified to the work of True Father. Afterward, prayers and songs could be heard clearly throughout the zoo entrance. Entertainment came complete with dancing and a serenade by trombonist Kevin Brennan, swing dancing and chatting with old and new friends. That evening the travelers witnessed a beautiful sunset at the beach before a storm hit, and knew True Father was present still.

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!

Miami, Florida

Pilgrimage road-trippers awoke on July 6 hoping to find clear, sunny skies, but were greeted instead by more heavy layers of clouds that signaled another day of pouring rain. The weather didn't stop them from singing joyfully on the ride and hearing from more of the passengers on the bus. Rev. Denise Freeman, pastor of a non-denominational church in Georgia, invited everyone to pray with her with an intentional heart and mind to start the day properly with the Heavenly Parent. Rev. Steen Miles then shared her testimony of how, as a TV anchorwoman and journalist, she went to Korea to attend one of the

conferences held by Unificationists. It was there that she saw people of many backgrounds, faiths and nations all in one place; it felt like home, and she knew she had found the truth about True Father and his vision for love and true families.



Local Unificationists make a family trip to the pilgrimage event in Miami.

With that testimony fresh in mind, the tour group arrived at the Miami Holy Ground and Sunday Service event. It was still pouring rain, which brought a feeling of “washing the grounds” before the event began. Father Eduardo de Zayas, president of the Companions of Jesus of Nazareth, gave the welcoming remarks, praising True Father and speaking of his lonely path and legacy for us to follow. The Family Church of Southern Florida led some rousing songs and Richard and Mari Curry, the local pastors, held Sunday Service.



Despite the rain, a crowd gathers at the Holy Ground in Miami.

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Savannah, Georgia



Surrounded by vibrant support and enthusiasm, visitors to the Holy Ground in Savannah share introductions and testimonies

It was a bright and beautiful day when the God's Hope for America bus arrived in Savannah, Georgia. Instead of only the expected five or six persons coming in from northern Florida and South Carolina, five more Unificationists showed up to represent Savannah. Including the 31 people from the bus tour, there was a grand total of 59 attendees at the Savannah Holy Ground. FFWPU USA President Dr. Michael Balcomb said, "It was 60 including God, our Heavenly Parent."



Under the shade of the Holy Ground tree, an unexpectedly larger group sings and prays at the 20th stop, Savannah, Georgia

At the Holy Ground testimonies were given by Senator Donzella James, Rev. Steen Miles and Mary Jane Dupres. Senator James, who represents Georgia's 35th District, spoke on the irony of Georgia housing several huge Fortune 500 companies. "The port of Savannah is where they brought the slave trade direct route to America. We have overcome slavery, but we still have so many isms to overcome," she said. In testifying to the vision of God's Hope for America, she added, "You can look at all the interpretations of the Bible of the Divine Principle, and they all say the same thing: that True Father and True Mother are here." Mary Jane Dupres, the first Unificationist in Savannah, offered more information about the Holy Ground itself.

Following the testimonies, the tour participants visited the First New African Methodist Church, which is led by Bishop Estella Edwards Shabazz and her husband, Pastor Yusuf Shabazz. Bishop and Pastor Shabazz have been urging the mayor of Savannah to have July 7, 2014, the date of this Holy Ground event, proclaimed as God's Hope for America Day while recognizing the work of True Father.

God's Blessing certainly showered down upon Savannah, Georgia, on this day!

Atlanta, Georgia

The bus arrived at the Atlanta State Capitol Building and at the base of a grand staircase in a space that housed the offices of judges, senators, and other members of state, the group gathered to share the God's Hope for America vision with the great state of Georgia.



After a day of deep words on God's vision, visitors to the Atlanta Holy Ground pray with great fervor

In her welcoming remarks, Senator James reminded us what makes this pilgrimage different: "I was travelling with people of all nationalities, ages, rich poor black white yellow red, different races, religions, all of us following the vision of Father Moon, a vision he had when he came to America 50 years ago. It's up to us to carry on this vision. We *are* the hope of America. Yes, a lot of the problems we had 50 years

ago are no longer with us and a lot of things have changed. It takes seconds to get information. Even though we have advanced so much over the years we still have not realized the true vision; we still do not have complete unity. We are not free of crime. We still have the demise of the family. True Parents have gathered us up and raised us up. No one ever asked me to change my faith. I'm interfaith. I am a product of segregation time but now, even that's changed. So we're moving forward because somebody had a vision, many people had a dream, and we're continuing to work. So don't give up and don't give in."



At the base of a grand staircase in the Capitol building in Atlanta, speeches were shared on God's vision for this nation

Many speakers that afternoon praised the message of one family under God. Senator Miles Steen has also been on the pilgrimage since Alabama and said, "I haven't felt this much spirit in this capital in a long, long time." After a resounding applause she went on to say, "I do believe God's Hope for America is represented in this room. We are part of the vision of Dr. Moon and we are first and foremost, family; family is love's first classroom and the cornerstone of our communities. There is an African term called 'Umbuto' and it is a reflection of a West African proverb which says, 'I am because you are. And because you are, therefore, I am.' It is the circle of life; it is who we are. I am not apart from you, just as we are all connected biologically. Even the trees are connected to us chemically to cleanse the very air that we breathe. And so on this pilgrimage we have stopped under mighty oak trees dripping with moss, trees that are hundreds of years old on this soil across this nation to realize a vision of one family under God."

The events of the day were momentous and served greatly towards reviving and reimagining a greater state for Georgia in the heart of Atlanta. They headed to the Martin Luther King memorial and said a prayer for America, then headed to the Atlanta Family Church for dinner and entertainment. It was a full day with so much to reflect on and pray for.

Once you've checked out the God's Hope for America Facebook page and tagged your friends in photos, you can share the albums, videos and updates on your own page! When you do so, make sure to use the hashtags function! This is done by typing [#GodsHopeforAmerica](#) in your status post, and it will automatically put your post, along with those of all the other hashtaggers, into one page. By clicking on the hashtag of your published post, you'll be able to see what others have shared on this same topic.