

## God's Hope for America Bus Tour - Meet Me at the Monument

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July 13, 2014



This summer, together with the #GodsHopeforAmerica pilgrimage, I've been following in the footsteps of Rev. Moon when he first came to the United States in 1965 to create Holy Grounds in every state of America, and then some. After three weeks, and over 5,700 wearying miles, we've finally made it to Washington DC.

Of course the District of Columbia is not a state and still has no voting representation in Congress—just like in 1965. But Father Moon didn't discriminate, and in fact our nation's capital has not one but two holy grounds.

I love Washington DC in many different ways, but one principal reason is walking down the National Mall is the closest thing to a time warp this side of a wormhole. Sure, there are new and beautiful memorials added every few years. But the timeless main monuments and buildings on the National Mall have changed little in over a hundred years, and certainly not since 1976, when I first came here as part of a crowd of 300,000 gathered for the "God Bless America" Bicentennial Celebration, inspired and organized by the Rev. Sun Myung Moon.

Our first holy ground prayer is on the Capitol West Lawn. Father Moon said he planted it there to make a place to all Americans pray for our lawmakers to be guided by God. Forgive me for being slightly cynical, but based on the woeful disunity of our recent Congresses, it seems we might need to pray at this holy ground a whole lot more!

We then walked a couple of miles to the second, larger holy ground, in the middle of the Ellipse near 17th and Constitution. It commands a splendid view of the White House and the Truman Balcony on one side, and the Washington Monument on the other. Or perhaps it's the other way round: both these iconic structures have an excellent view of the Holy Ground.

Not that there's really all that much to see: the closest thing to a marker is an unobtrusive meridian stone embedded into the grass, easy to overlook or even miss entirely. But while there may be little to see,

there's always something deep to feel.

Closing my eyes, and trying to ignore the sun relentlessly beating down, I was mentally transported back to that mid-September day in 1976 when Rev. Moon delivered his forceful call for repentance and renewal.

I was there that day, leading a busload of slightly mystified New Yorkers from the lower East Side that I'd convinced to ride a bus with me down to DC. Just 19 years old, young in my faith, and visiting Washington for the first time, it was an almost surreal experience. I was surrounded by a real sea of humanity of all races, cultures and religions and I was both curious and impatient to hear what Rev. Moon, who was by then telling people he was the Messiah, had to say. He didn't disappoint, with a message that I found visionary, and inspiring—

**“The United States of America, transcending race and nationality, is already a model of the unified world. ‘One World Under God’ is the unchanging, eternal and absolute desire of God. This goal will be realized; yet, in order to accomplish this goal, the unity of religions is the first and essential task.”**

But then came this significant challenge:

**When all men worship one God as Father, accept one Messiah and uphold one Godism, an absolutely God-centered way of life, then the dwelling of God will be with men.**

Though he always clarified that it was Jesus who had called, appointed and anointed him, Rev. Moon's bold declaration of his own messianic mission was to make him a lot of enemies. A firestorm of controversy followed Rev. Moon's breakthrough success at the Monument, as it dawned on the Washington elite that he was a force to be reckoned with.

Media, political and even religious leaders began to look for ways to slow his progress, a campaign that would finally lead to him being indicted and convicted on tax charges in 1982. By the time he had finished serving a one-year sentence in the Federal Correctional Institute in Danbury, CT, a strong and broad consensus had emerged that he had been a victim of selective and unfair prosecution.

But that's a story for another day: next Friday, in fact, when the God's Hope for America pilgrimage tour will make a stop in Danbury to pray and to petition that this injustice be acknowledged and restored.