

Unificationist congregations in Mobile, Alabama, Atlanta, Georgia and Columbus, Ohio honor of True Father's Seonghwa Anniversary

Michel Balcomb
October 7, 2014

In honor of True Father's Seonghwa Anniversary, Unificationist congregations in Mobile, Alabama, Atlanta, Georgia and Columbus, Ohio marked the occasion with interfaith celebrations that carried the spirit of True Father's legacy of interreligious harmony. In addition to the National Memorial Service held on September 20, ministers and even politicians gathered again at these unique local celebrations, sharing stories of the impact that True Father had on the world, and on themselves personally. With events like these we can see that True Father has deeply touched every corner of the nation.

Mobile, Alabama



On Saturday, September 27, 2014, the Family Church of Alabama commemorated the second anniversary of True Father's Seonghwa with a beautiful event. After last year's first Memorial Service, the local council and community decided that they would make this annual event the best and most memorable event of the year. It would be "an opportunity to witness to True Parents and the great legacy True Father has given us to share with the world," said Rev. Terry Yamane.

Pastel decorations and fragrant flowers filled the church, creating a lavish atmosphere for a reception with gourmet sandwiches and homemade sweets. Congregants and guests gathered in fellowship before the main program, enjoying the beautiful atmosphere.

The program's theme was "Interfaith Unity and Harmony Among Religions," with the keynote address given by Dr. Frank Kaufmann, director of the Inter Religious Federation for World Peace. Also in attendance were local Imam Henry Haseeb and his wife, Joyce; the venerable Tich, a Buddhist monk; Pastor D.B. Bennett, a Christian minister and pastor of the Freewater Baptist Church; Ruthie Finamore, a representative of the Jewish faith, and the representative of the Unification faith, Rev. Steven Wilson.

The religious leaders took part in the Holy Water Peace Ceremony by reading from their respective scriptures, then pouring their individual chalices of water into one large bowl, representing one united body of faith. After the leaders held hands and lifted them up as one, Rev. Yamane and her husband used the water to bless the participants in the audience and include everyone in the spirit of the ceremony.

It is interesting to note that the guest speaker, Dr. Kaufmann, was the one who originally had received the inspiration for this ceremony which has been performed by faith leaders throughout the world. All the participants were deeply moved by the symbolism and felt a great sense of hope and joy.

Following the interfaith ceremony guests were inspired to hear the testimonies of Randy and Margret Orr and Abayomi and Miho Oladipo. The couples spoke of their being blessed in marriage by True Father and the importance of family. Margret brought the point home by speaking about Rev. Moon's original vision behind the Holy Marriage Blessing Ceremony and the effort and faith it takes to build a true family centered upon God. "Our families are the greatest testimony to the heart of our True Parents' legacy," said Rev. Yamane.

Beautiful musical performances set the atmosphere for the main address, including a Cambodian musician

playing traditional instruments and a soulful rendition of “I Believe” by Earl Warbington.

Dr. Kaufmann was welcomed with warm applause and expectation, and addressed the nearly 100 guests and family members by asking the question, “Would you rather be challenged today or would you like for me to give you a nice speech?” The crowd answered with one voice that they wanted to be challenged, and Dr. Kaufmann delivered. The opening slide of his presentation began with the words found at the end of the General Introduction to Divine Principle:

With the fullness of time, God has sent his messenger to resolve the fundamental questions of life and the universe. His name is Sun Myung Moon.

The audience felt the power of his message as Dr. Kaufmann elaborated how this book is in the library and has been in print since 1960. These words have been published and proclaimed. “Did you ever hear of any religious leader who has said they are here to resolve the fundamental questions of life and the universe?” he asked. During his speech you could have heard a pin drop, with everyone’s attention focused on his every word.

The response was positive. The crowd was in high spirits as they talked and asked questions. Rev. Yamane commented, “I felt it was the perfect presentation for the event. Walls were broken down in an atmosphere of love and truth, as it should be.”

Rev. Steven Wilson ended the program with a rousing call to action as he encouraged everyone not just to be inspired by Rev. Moon but also to apply his words, vision and example to their own lives. “We all must build the Kingdom of Heaven together!” he said.

After a warm fellowship and an official closing of the event, Dr. Kaufmann, Bayou La Batre Mayor and Mrs. Brett Dungan, Rev. and Mrs. Wilson, and several of the participants enjoyed dinner and continued discussion at a local seafood restaurant.

The spirit of the event even trickled over to the next day, when Dr. Kaufmann gave the Sunday sermon and reminded the congregation of True Father’s guidance about serving other churches on Sunday morning. He told how he took these words to heart and has been serving at All Saints Episcopal Church in his neighborhood of Sunnyside in the New York City borough of Queens. He gave much of his personal testimony, including how he gradually grew from merely attending church to becoming a choir member, a board member and finally a preacher. Rev. Yamane said, “His experience was a very valuable education for all of us, as he challenged us to rethink about our own Sunday service and how we can make it deeper, better and more meaningful. It was wonderful to have such sincere guidance from an elder brother in our faith, who has had so many personal experiences with the True Family.”

By all accounts it was a rich and wonderful weekend in celebration of our True Parents and the living legacy that the community feels and experiences all around them. “We have so much to be thankful for and so much work to do,” said Rev. Yamane, “We look forward to working together with our beautiful True Mother toward Vision 2020.”

The Family Church of Alabama would like to thank the whole community, and especially their guest Dr. Frank Kaufmann, for helping to create such a memorable weekend.

Atlanta, Georgia

A little rain couldn’t dampen the spirits of Unificationists in Georgia, as they gathered around a bandstand in downtown Decatur, a town just outside Atlanta, on September 14. Pastor Haruki Kim Kimura, Assistant Pastor Kimbembé Koko, Council Chair Celeste Koshida and local Unificationists came together for a special celebration in honor of the second anniversary of True Father’s Seonghwa.

The Youth Praise and Worship Group began the service with songs as participants gathered, including many community leaders. Pastor Gloria Wright, an author and active board member of the Concerned Black Clergy, started off the proceedings with a prayer thanking God for the work that Father Moon and all the Unificationists have done for peace. Former State Senator Steen Miles then gave a Bible reading on the topic of renewing our spirit and declared the slogan for the day: “One Family under God is God’s Hope for America.”

After more music from professional accompanist Steve Long followed by another song from the Praise Team, the MC, former Pastor Cliff Gaines, invited up Rev. Jack Whedbee to give the main message.

After sharing a little of what first inspired him about the Divine Principle when he began studying while in college, he spoke directly and to the point about how Jesus had not come to die. He challenged the audience by posing the question, “If Jesus came again and was born in the flesh, what kind of things would he do?” Rev. Whedbee went on to talk about the vast and wide array of things that Father Moon

did in his lifetime.

Next Rev. Denise Freeman, a local politician, gave an inspiring testimony about her first time hearing True Father speak in Korea. She said she realized that “in order to really make a change, the change had to happen on a global level, and that is what Rev. Moon had been doing.” She spoke of the many people throughout history who were willing to give their lives for the sake of peace. “We can’t just give money to a cause; we have to give of ourselves like Rev. Moon,” she said. “We are all heirs to the Kingdom of God, but we all need to serve as Rev. Moon came to serve, in order to get there.” By the end of her inspiring talk, she had the audience on their feet chanting, “God’s Hope for America will manifest through me!”

Chief Apostle Willie Malcom from the Triumph the Church and Kingdom of God in Christ also gave a testimony about his first encounter with Rev. Moon on a trip to Korea. He told the participants that he was so amazed at the assembled group in Korea from all faiths and denominations, and how no one was judging anyone else. He testified that Jesus has been working through Rev. Moon, which makes him the Second Coming of Jesus. “What’s wrong with that?” he asked. “Let’s call it what it is.” He ended with the chant, “Free at last, free at last, thank God Almighty we are a united world. Thank you, Rev. and Mother Moon!”

An amazing musical tribute performed by Ja’Naan, a liaison for the Jazz Collaborative, together with the Praise Team, closed out the program. After a heartfelt prayer, the spirit was still buzzing around the park. Many passers-by were drawn in by the wonderful music and the enthusiastic atmosphere.

The community is thankful for a wonderful event and hopes that it can continue these kinds of gatherings on a regular basis to enliven its community and to outreach to others.

Columbus, Ohio



On Sunday, September 28, a memorial service was held in Columbus for True Father, just a week after the National Memorial Service in New York City. The room regularly used for Sunday Service was transformed into a banquet hall with round tables, white tablecloths, a banner and beautiful decorations. Because the national event preceded theirs, the Columbus gathering could enjoy the same presentation on True Father’s life as well as True Mother’s speech dictated by Professor Yeon Ah Moon.

The rest of the program highlighted four couples who shared about how True Parents have shaped their lives. The couples shared how grateful they were to True Parents for giving them life and the knowledge of what true love is and how they struggled, made sacrifices and triumphed in the end to honor True Parents. A participant shared that “those testimonies really made me want to be like those couples.” This is the legacy of our True Parents.

A musical offering, followed by opening remarks by the Family Federation for World Peace and Unification (FFWPU USA) Vice President, Alexa Ward, rounded out a satisfyingly deep and personable commemoration.

The event had two major aims: the first was to inspire Unificationists with the legacy of True Parents that is alive and well in the culture of our families, particularly young couples. The second aim was to send this message to our guests: “Unificationists are determined to create world peace through building up families based on the teachings of True Parents.”



This memorial brought home the real impact of True Father's life and the legacy and spirit of never giving up, continuously striving to do God's work, and putting God in the forefront and center of our families.