

Headquarters Staff Tyler Hendricks, David Rendel, Karlsun Allen, Dave Hunter, Tamara Gavin and Victoria Roomet Share “What the Holiday Season Means to Me”: Part One

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Christmas Day, God’s Day, New Year’s Eve, and the Day of Victory of Love. Two holidays established in one religious community within the last 50 years and two holidays that have been a significant part of human history for centuries. All four of which, until recently, took place within the span of one week*. With so many festivities to plan in so short a time, what have Unificationists in the United States done to celebrate these holidays? What traditions were blended as a result of being part of a multi-racial, multi-religious, and multi-cultural movement that seeks to uphold the teachings of Rev. and Mrs. Sun Myung Moon, the “True Parents?”

For many, the end of the year means parties, reckless behavior and copious amounts of alcohol, but for most Unificationists, the end of December provides an opportunity for deep contemplation. Christmas is a time for engaging in fellowship amongst church members, New Year’s Eve encourages families to establish resolutions through religious conditions and God’s Day inspires many to rededicate their faith to God and True Parents. Employees at HSA-UWC, first- and second-generation Unificationists from various walks of life, share brief accounts of their holiday traditions below.

*God’s Day, originally celebrated on January 1st, is as of 2010 based on the lunar calendar. God’s Day in year 2013 will take place on February 10th.

Testimonies from the Administrative Team



Rev. David Rendel, director of Operations: “When I was growing up, Christmas for my family was a time of giving to the community. My father was a doctor and grew up in the country. A Christmas tradition for me and my brothers was to take pecan pies made by my mother, who was famous for them, and travel through the countryside of Indiana delivering them. That way, I had a chance to visit all kinds of people who had been patients of my grandfather and father. I was able to connect to the roots of my family by delivering these pies. Soon, people began to expect these pies every Christmas. It was really a great experience. In my childhood, Christmas was centered more on the religious side of the holiday – it wasn’t nearly as commercial in those days. Sometimes now, we forget that Christ was given as a gift to humankind.

“When I got older, I became a Christian missionary. I was a carpenter, and every Christmas, I would make things out of wood for my family. I would not buy anything. One year, I made window frames where the wood was sliced so thinly that the light would shine through, and you’d see the grain of the wood, and gave one to every member of my family and extended family. This became something we practice with my wife and my daughter. We don’t buy much for each other. Instead, we’ll give one or two things that are unique and practical. I’m grateful that my daughter has never felt a lacking of receiving material-type gifts. We try to keep the holiday very holy.

“A big thing for us is the preparation for God’s Day. We would write out a report of the last year, burn the paper, pray, and then make new resolutions for the next year. I felt that the fact that God’s Day had coincided with New Year’s Eve was an interference, with all the fireworks and all; we wanted to make this time more serious. I found that with my family, it was better to keep things simple. That way we could have more of a focus.”



Karlsun Allen and his family are a fan of the Austrian festival "Kriskinder," which they frequent every year.

Karlsun Allen, assistant to Director of Operations: “We’d celebrate Christmas on Christmas eve, which is an Austrian tradition coming from my mother’s side. We’d often cut down a tree ourselves, then take care of our stockings, then give each other gifts one at a time. Usually before we started giving gifts, my dad would pray, and we’d do a little bit of *Hoon Dok Hwe*. For God’s Day, we would always pledge at midnight and have a good morning service with just our family, and occasionally, at our local church. For the Day of Victory of Love, we’d sometimes make an offering table. For the past few years in New Jersey, we’ve been going to a *Kriskinder*, or “Christ child” festival, which is an Austrian fair with Austrian food and music that happens in December.”

Testimonies from the Ministry Team



Dave Hunter and his mother, Elizabeth (Betsy) cuddle at their apartment in Annandale Virginia, circa 1981.

Dave Hunter, young-adult pastor and curriculum developer: “When I was growing up, we would go out and chop down our own Christmas tree. Back when I still believed in Santa Claus, we would decorate the tree together, then the presents would magically arrive, and we would open them on Christmas morning, we would have breakfast together, and my brother and I would play with our toys. As I got older, I liked going to Christian churches on Christmas Eve. It became important for me to understand the meaning of Christmas and of Jesus’ sacrifice, and Christian youth services always had good music, some sort of memorable message, a story-telling of Jesus’ birth, and they’d do it all in a mystical fashion. I always wanted to bring this kind of spirit into the Unification Church, for not only Jesus’ birth, but also True Father’s. As for God’s Day, when we would have to get dressed up and drive to our church at 5:00 a.m., I didn’t really like it as a child. My idea of celebrating is to have a more intimate atmosphere and share in a nice meal. I’m not one for too many rituals. I think it’s important to create a holy atmosphere where kids can have fun, so that they want to pass down the traditions to their kids.”

Dr. Tyler Hendricks, theologian and curriculum developer: “True Parents used to have Christmas dinners for members who lived in the East Garden area. That was really nice. Also, we had Christmas parties at Unification Theological Seminary (UTS). Sometimes, it was for all the members in the community, sometimes for UTS staff. We even came up with a game where each person would bring a wrapped present worth \$10 or \$20. Then, at random, we picked names, and the person who was picked would get to choose any present and open it. Then, the next person could either take that present from them, or pick a new one from the collection. It was a lot of fun as presents circulated among many people, because if someone took the present from you, you could take one from someone else. Then, we would sing Christmas carols. I *love* Christmas carols. When I was in college, my friends one Christmas pulled together a little troupe to go door to door, singing Christmas carols. We’d just sing, and people would come to the door and look and listen. Sometimes they gave us something to munch on or drink.

“My family loves Christmas. We always have a tree and decorations and lights out in front of the house.

My kids used to dress up like Santa and walk into the living room with candles, turning out the lights and singing Christmas songs. Especially this year, we appreciate the Christmas cheer.”



Tamara Gavin, creative director of Ministry Support: “Christmas is a special time for Jaga and me, because on December 23, 2002, we said our ‘I-Do’s’ in front of our family and friends. I wore a white cashmere sweater with white pearls that my mother wore on her wedding day and Jaga wore a Christmas-y red shirt. My bouquet was made of Christmas holly and winter berries. After getting married right in front of the Christmas tree in a short and sweet ceremony, we sang ‘Joy to the World.’ We laughed because I think only my Grandma knew the second verse to the song! A fresh foot of snow had fallen that morning, and as we departed the house to leave to our ‘honeymoon’ bed & breakfast destination, I pulled on my winter boots over my wedding outfit and we shoveled the car out of the snow. We were singing Christmas Carols with big smiles on our faces when we pulled into the cozy Inn that evening, and we found ourselves in a magical Christmas fairytale that we’ll never forget. This year we celebrate 10 years.



“My grandma often makes rice pudding with lignonberries, which is a Swedish tradition, on Christmas Eve. We would also usually have a ‘Devotional’ where we would gather in a big circle and read scripture and share about what that means in our lives. What really strengthened our faith as Unificationists was first discovering Christianity and the Bible. Jesus is very important to us, so I really like the idea of honoring Him and this holiday. A German tradition from Jaga’s family is opening one gift on Christmas Eve. They would also get the Christmas tree on Christmas Eve. I love having a tree throughout the month of December, so I can’t imagine only having it for that one day! And opening a gift the night before seems like cheating to me. But, we do plan to spend Christmas in Germany one of these years, and that will be the year that we honor those traditions with his grandmother.

“As Unificationists, we found God’s Day to be the most meaningful holy day, but now that it’s no longer on January 1st, it has been more challenging to have that attitude of renewal that goes along with a new year. When we lived in North Carolina, we would hike up mountains on God’s Day, pray, and reflect on God’s will for our lives. When we prayed on God’s Day in 2009, we asked Him to open our eyes to opportunities to give back to our Unificationist community. It was that year that Jaga was invited to join Headquarters in New York. God has given us so many gifts, and every holiday season we are reminded of the gift of Jesus Christ and our little wedding ceremony, which marks the moment God gave us each other.”



Victoria Roomet, president of Collegiate Association for the Research of Principles (CARP): “The holiday season always brings warm, fuzzy memories of quality time spent with the family. I benefit from my parents being an international couple with very complementary Christmas traditions. Christmas Eve, or *Nochebuena*, is celebrated with our Argentinean relatives on my mother’s side of the family. It constitutes hours of eating delicious food and then gift-opening at midnight. The following day, we partake in the more traditionally American Christmas customs of gift-opening in the morning and a feast in the evening. We often would visit my grandparents in New Jersey at some point during our holiday vacation time and enjoy the annual Roomet family traditions of eating melt-in-your-mouth *meringues*, getting our seashells-turned-tree ornaments made by my grandmother, and taking turns to guess what the ‘guess what this is’ gift is. Of course, the winner would keep the gift. Beyond our immediate relatives, we have always welcomed extending the holiday festivities for a few more days, by hosting and participating in Christmas Part 2 celebrations and feasts. On God's Day, we would usually burn things that we wanted to let go of from the past year (like written-down on a piece of paper), do a midnight prayer, and then begin the year with goals that we wrote down as well. I enjoyed that tradition because it felt good to start the year off intentionally with God.”