

Eric Palhof's and Mason Hwang's Travel Networks Provide Unificationist Families Free Travel Housing

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Eric Palhof, pictured with his wife Richiko, founded Hospitality Homes to connect Unificationist families.

Two Unificationist travel networks have been initiated to help Unificationists cut down on travel expenses and connect to their global family. The Blessed Families Association (BFA), a Unification Church organization originally designed to help Unificationist families support and communicate with one another, and Mason Hwang, a second-generation Unificationist from Korea, have developed methods to help traveling Unificationists stay with families of the same faith background.

The BFA officially has existed in the United States since November 2004, providing financial-, educational- and communication-related support to Unificationist families around the nation. According to David Hill of Columbia, MD, the BFA originally was developed to help parents meet each other and find potential spouses for their children, and over time, the website expanded to include other services.

Hill says that “the beautiful thing about the BFA website is that it works from the ground up. It’s a forum designed and run by members and is not a hierarchical group. That way, it’s flexible to the needs and desires of our community. It allows you to connect to a wider audience. You can post anything on the website – whether you’re looking to launch a career in art and want to gain an audience or whether you’re looking to relocate or find information about upcoming events. The website also features local news and classified ads for our community.”

Hospitality Homes, a subgroup within the BFA, is a network of Unificationist families who extend the comfort of their homes to traveling Unificationists. Members can access the list of such families and homes by registering for the BFA (online link www.blessedfamilies.org/bfa/index.php?p=aboutbfa) and joining Hospitality Homes. According to Hill, “It’s a lot neater than staying at a hotel and cheaper – often free of charge! Guests will often on their own decide to bring something like fruit or chocolate in exchange for their stay. I don’t think we spend enough personal time with one another, and this is a great chance to connect on a national level.”

Florida resident Eric Palhof, the creator of Hospitality Homes, explained the source of his inspiration to found the group. “I started to realize that my kids were leaving home and that I was going to have an empty nest,” he said. “So I thought to myself, what better way is there to get to know other members of our community than visiting each other’s homes? I rarely travel, but when I do, I dislike staying at hotels and motels, because they are sterile, and there’s no one there to talk with you. It’s like being in a bubble. Why not make a national network of homes to stay at? Really, what better way is there to serve each other than opening up our homes to each other?”

Palhof elaborated on how Hospitality Homes is an asset for parents trying to find spouses for their children: “Parents are at a huge disadvantage when they don’t know many people. I’ve heard about ‘Matching Convocations’ where parents can meet and discuss potential matches, but this doesn’t appeal to me, because I feel that it’s like speed dating. Hospitality Homes is a natural way for parents to meet each other and build up their network. This doesn’t mean they’re necessarily going to match their child to the family they stay with, but it at least builds a larger contact base.” Palhof’s dream is to expand the Hospitality Homes network to a worldwide level, and already has helped established several host homes in Europe and Asia.

David and Cathy Mahardy wrote of Hospitality Homes on the BFA website: “I’ve been encouraging my children to invite their friends from all over the country to stay at our house whenever they need lodging. My own daughter travels frequently and always finds a [Unificationist] family to stay with, making the trip all the nicer.”

“Many years ago, Father said we should visit [Unificationist families] when we travel and feel at home,” wrote Leonard and Marianne Thiesen. “Recently, my son, Markus, my daughter, Katrina, and I visited the home of David and Cathy Mahardy, and even though we only stayed one night, I feel like we made new friends. Our families are a great treasure, and this network, I believe, is a great tool for building a worldwide family. Thanks again to Eric Palhof for creating this group.”

Neil Angelino, from New Jersey, said: “Once, I was traveling with my family and friends and we wanted to get back in time for Sunday Service the next day, but we knew we wouldn’t be able to make it in time. So instead, we put our thinking caps on and realized we could make it to the Washington, D.C. service, which was closer at the time. We looked up families on Hospitality Homes and saw a family we knew from camp. We gave them a call and were able to stay at their house that night. The next day, we went to church and went out with our host family to lunch. We enjoyed our experience; it worked out great!

“It’s comforting to be able to go anywhere in the world and have a place to stay. This is one great program and deserves attention. It’s unique to our movement, and it works, because we have our True Parents, Rev. and Mrs. Sun Myung Moon. They have allowed for us to be one family. We can use this network as a vehicle to support one another. Sometimes you know the people and sometimes you don’t, but it always works out great.”



Second-generation Unificationist Mason Hwang created the Facebook group "BC House and Travel."

A Network of Unificationist Homes on Facebook

This summer, a Facebook group called “BC House and Travel” became a hot topic within the Unificationist community. Within a day after being created, more than 1,000 members had joined the group, and now, only three weeks later, the group has nearly 2,500 members.

According to the Facebook page, BC House and Travel is a platform on which young Unificationists (at least 18 years old) around the world can post and request a place to stay when traveling. Members of the Facebook group are encouraged to invite other Unificationists and their parents to join the group and are asked to post where and when they stay at a given home so that other members can ensure their safety. Members also are encouraged to make a small donation to those who welcome them into their homes.

The creator of the group, second-generation Unificationist Mason Hwang, 18, said, “I’ve been traveling a lot recently, and whenever I needed a place to stay, I found one with other young Unificationists. Therefore, I thought that creating a convenient way to find these places would be awesome, and what better medium is there than Facebook? With Facebook, we could constantly update when and where young Unificationists meet each other. I shared the idea with my friends, Aika Greenridge and Donny Palmigiano, and they helped me create the Facebook page. We invited 500 people and overnight, that number turned into 1,600. In four days we had more than 2,200 people. I am very happy that the page is working so well, and I hope it will make the Unificationist community closer. I hope to find other ideas and ways in which I can contribute to our global community.”

Individuals can only join the Facebook group if approved or invited, which helps protect the identity of Unificationist families, and can be found at www.facebook.com/groups/387308614663614/members/