

Remembering the Preparations for the Yankee Stadium Rally in 1976

Interview of Neil Salonen

June 2016

President of the Unification Church USA in 1976



Question: Please tell us about the preparation for the rally.

When True Parents came to the United States in 1972, Father consistently spoke of his mission to wake up the nation to its very different. There was still the great challenge of world communism, which worried many people, the sudden explosion in the use of drugs and free sex and a decline in the strength of churches influencing governmental policy. He wanted to call people to their moral responsibilities.

America had had such great material blessings, not just for its own sake but for the purpose of helping all the other peoples of the world. He traveled to every state in America giving his speech, "God's Hope for America." He was strong. He was hopeful. He was inspiring.

People little by little began to feel the intensity of our national purpose. All of this came in 1976, the bicentennial, two hundred years since the American Revolution. The Yankee Stadium rally was meant to be the national culmination of four years of evangelical reaching out.

We were inspired. Not only did we prepare for the rally but also in preparation for that -- through the efforts of many of our members here in New York -- we made uniforms with God Bless America on them and we went out and voluntarily kept the New York City streets clean. It is very simple if you think about it. If everybody were to clean the streets in front of their houses, we would not have any problems on the streets. Yet everybody must do his part and must trust that everybody else will do his part. Even my daughter who was two years old at that time had a little God Bless America uniform and we went out to clean the streets. It was in the newspapers; it was everywhere.

As we came up to the Yankee Stadium event, we were optimistic that the whole nation would suddenly recognize their responsibility.



Question: What was Father saying? How did True Parents prepare for this?

He was consistent. In fact, that was one of his great strengths. I think we all recognize that when we think about our relationship with True Father. You knew what he stood for. More than that, we know there are still things within ourselves we need to improve. He was very strong in reminding us of the areas we had to repent for and how we had to strengthen ourselves. Behind that, we always felt his love -- actually representing Heaven and that Heaven wanted us to succeed. We just had to do our part. He was consistent in saying that it will not happen if you make a partial effort; it won't happen if to do a little bit. You have to give everything you have! Then, miracles can happen because that's the foundation upon which Heaven can move.

At that time, every day I was exhausted, but I also remember being absolutely happy because all of us were putting everything we had into calling America to its national responsibility.

Question: As MC that day, how do you feel the audience responded to True Father's message?

I always felt that people who came had a transformative experience. He could connect even with a large group, those they could not even see him well. They could feel connected as one. The issue was never could we inspire the people who came, the issue was did we do a good enough job to bring enough people.

People are talking, as we think about the fortieth anniversary, that in some ways while we were very hopeful and our movement was very optimistic at that time, many things have happened in the last forty years.

The world is at a very challenging point. The threat of communism is gone, but idealism seems also to have disappeared. People are leading very selfish lives. Politics is no longer collaborative; people are kind of fighting against each other. The hopefulness of different religious realms working together has turned into almost a fearfulness, where you have some people talking about their fear of Muslims, of their fear of radical Christians.

In some ways, people think we are not in a good moment. I see it differently. You have to come to the breaking point for people to realize that something must dramatically change. That is why some of the political candidates -- even outrageous ones -- are getting support because people want to see change.

In some ways. Things have to go down pretty low before everyone is open to the idea of trying a fundamental new approach.

In some ways, it was like that forty years ago. I think that we are at a very similar moment now from some points of view. We have an opportunity to relaunch the spirit of the Yankee Stadium crusade and we can do amazing things.

Question: True Mother came at this time to celebrate the anniversary.

We are aware that when Father went around the United States, when True Father spoke, he did not go alone. True Mother was with him every step of the way. Because we were young and inexperienced, I am sure he must have had to fight against feeling discouraged, but Mother never was -- never. Mother consistently supported him while nurturing us. We did not pay enough attention to it at the time, because he was such a strong presence, but she was also an important influence. Her being here for this celebration reminds us of the consistent passion and desire that Heaven has for America to wake up to its responsibilities. Her being here will be a great help in our being able to strike that spark.

