

Meet Us at the Monument for the Second God Bless America Festival

Neil Salonen
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From Connecticut to North Carolina, buses will be converging on Washington, D. C., on September 18th for the second God Bless America Festival. The occasion will be the next public speaking appearance of the Reverend Sun Myung Moon. In announcing the Festival to the press on July 26, Unification Church of America President Neil Salonen said he anticipated the event being "the most meaningful bicentennial observance here in Washington of the year."



"Basically we have the same purposes that we did at Yankee Stadium," President Salonen continued, "which is essentially to honor God and to return thanks to Him for all the blessings that He's given America in our 200-year history. We believe that the prosperity of this country is a direct result of the blessings God has given us and to the extent Americans have lost their faith in God, they have lost their blessings. Therefore, the way to renew our hope of prosperity, our vision, and our goals for the future, and the way to continue to extend helping hands to other countries throughout the world is to renew our relationship with God."

Highlight of the program, of course, will be the address of Reverend Sun Myung Moon. He will speak on America's role in building the Kingdom of God on earth. A crowd of 45,000 heard Reverend Moon's message on June 1 at Yankee Stadium, "God's Hope for America." Festival organizers in Washington are estimating an attendance of 100,000, with groups scheduled to attend from every state. Mr. Salonen said this figure could easily be surpassed. "Frankly, our estimate may be very conservative. Since this is not a ticket-holder event, we won't know until just a few days before the festival how many are really coming," he said.

Pre-festival entertainment will begin at 3:30 p.m. with more than 200 singers, dancers and musicians from around the world participating. At 6 p.m. the festival will officially open with music from the New Hope Singers International, a chorus of 52 singers from 10 countries around the world. Other entertainment will be provided by the colorful Korean Folk Ballet and Sunburst, a folk rock ensemble that has become popular for its many benefits at schools, hospitals, churches, and nursing homes.

To close the evening's festivities an international fireworks display contributed by 20 nations will "light up the heavens."

In advance of the September 18 Festival, more than 200 Unification members are actively involved in community service projects throughout Washington, D.C., and surrounding suburban areas. "The idea is to turn people on to (God through our service in the community," said Michael Leone, coordinator. The experimental project is partly under the leadership of Unification Theological Seminary students working on summer field education projects. Each group selects its own activities -- from a Family Association to discuss national and community goals during this bicentennial year, to folk-dancing and guitar classes

billed as part of an "Unselfish Way of Life Program," to clean-up contests for neighborhood youngsters.



Unification Church members have been organizing a variety of programs for youngsters in the Washington, D. C. area to stimulate community service projects.

In Shirley Duke, Virginia, a number of the children decided to undertake the clean-up on a regular basis. A 14-year-old participant stated, "We're trying our hardest to clean up here and make this place clean. And if they mess it up, we'll clean it up again, and keep cleaning it up until people look at us and think, 'What are we doing to our beautiful world?'" Block parties are a popular project to draw together parents, children, community merchants and authorities working for a common goal. The "Bicentennial Block Party" in Seat Pleasant, Maryland, included a speech contest on "What Does America Mean to Me?" The 13-member Gospel singing Voices of Freedom, Unity and Love highlighted a community rally and block party for 150 Glassmanor residents.



The Voices of Freedom, Unity and Love, led by James Anderson (front), have been performing gospel music at rallies, block parties, and other community events.

Lloyd Eby, a former philosophy instructor at Albany State University and currently a second-year student at Unification Theological Seminary, organized the Glassmanor rally with the slogan "Let's Unite Glassmanor Under God." Eby explained, "True unity, lasting unity, can only come on a spiritual base. People can unite for particular goals such as a community center, but unity lasts only as long as that particular goal is there. When that goal is gone, people drift apart. But if they can unite on faith or spiritual principles, that unity will last and particular projects will not be difficult."

There is in America today a mood of impotence, a belief that our future lies in the hands of outside forces. "Someone else" is to blame for whatever goes wrong. And yet, until recent times, there was a strong trend for individuals to take initiative to solve public problems. We are a nation of people with great ability. The desire to serve is also there, but has been frustrated and bottled up. If we can release that fountainhead of idealistic will power, great strides could be made toward solving this nation's problems and the problems of this world. When people can again feel God working in their lives, when they feel His presence and seek His guidance, they will find the resources to accomplish whatever must be done to set things right again. The key, as Mr. Salonen emphasized, is that America must "renew her relationship with God."