

Atlanta, GA Family Church Youth and Young Adult Ministry's Awaken Experience

Young Tack Yang
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From July 12 to 14, 50 young Unificationists gathered at the Georgia Family Community Center in Atlanta for the latest Youth and Young Adult Ministry (YAYAM) experience. The weekend was labelled as such because it was a first-of-its-kind event born of a desire to provide a welcoming space for young people to experience God and form bonds stretching across communities and states.

For the first time ever, Southeast Subregion pastors under 40 teamed up with the subregional staff to create an unforgettable experience for youth, young adults, and their young children to share. The age range was broad, with some participants as young as 16 and others in their late 30s. Participants flew in from as far as South Florida and Maryland. Others drove many hours from the Carolinas, Alabama, Mississippi and Tennessee to join Georgia locals.



The program officially began on Friday night with a lively "Space Jam" dance introduction from the staff. After everybody was on their feet, Pastor Jario Gavin from the Gather Family Church in Mobile, Alabama introduced the theme, inviting everyone to "Awaken" to the reality that God lives within us.

This was followed by a round of icebreakers led by Pastor Josh Angelucci of the Triangle Family Church in Durham, North Carolina. Before closing the evening together, participants were asked to think about their intentions for the next few days and to ask themselves what they wanted to gain from being there. People then shared their intentions with one another and prayed for each other.

Saturday was a full day of interactive sessions that touched people in different ways. In the morning, each

of the young pastors shared about their own journeys and the motivation that keeps them going. One attendee later said, "It is great to have older brothers and sisters and people in prominent positions in the Unification movement be vulnerable and honest about their lives." Afterward, everyone was invited to write their own "why" on a sticky note and paste it on a poster in the back of the room.

An animated series of World Cafe discussions followed, where participants shared about the core Unification values they want to inherit, their vision for an ideal movement, and their beliefs about how the Unification movement might more effectively impact the world. It was a chance to reflect deeply on both the foundation previously laid as well as the kind of future young Unificationists want to create for themselves and their children. "I greatly appreciated the honest sharing that addressed current needs in other communities," said N. Phillips, the YAYAM Coordinator for the Southeast Subregion.



After a delicious lunch prepared by the hard-working kitchen staff, the afternoon kicked off with two sets of breakout sessions where attendees chose from a variety of topics. Depending on their interests, participants gathered to discuss productivity, building a relationship with God, self-awareness, healthy marriages, finances, or decluttering.

The final session before dinner was a QandA panel with pastors and subregional coordinators. No question was off-limits and vital issues were raised, including how to make distant young Unificationists feel welcome and how to get more involved locally. A 16-year-old from Georgia shared this in her reflection, "My question was answered and I felt a heavy weight lift off my shoulders... I felt empowered to do something for those in my community."

With all the build-up and anticipation throughout the day, the energy exploded during Worship Night. The band from Miami, led by Pastor Joe Young of the South Florida Family Church, played an inspiring and moving set list that had people on their feet for nearly two hours. Interspersed between songs were short but powerful messages by several pastors and band members. "My wife and I had not experienced such an amazing worship service in years," shared Cliff Gaines from Atlanta. "It was so powerful that we were moved to tears and were overcome with emotion."

So much had already happened in this short amount of time, but the program was not over yet. The next day, participants joined local Unificationists for a unified Sunday Service and Inauguration of Rev. Young Tack Yang as the new District 5 Pastor. There, a special message was shared by Regional Chairman of Family Federation North America, Dr. Ki Hoon Kim, who spoke of the hope and miracles that will come when we unite with the vision of True Parents. Southeast Subregional Secretary General, Rev. Jongsook Moon, was honored for her time as interim district pastor and passed the torch to Rev. Yang who gave the sermon. After lunch, several "Awaken" participants took to the stage at the conclusion to dance the popular "Mujogeon."

At the end of it all, one parent said, "For a while I haven't felt much hope for the Unification movement, but this event has given me so much hope. Especially after meeting the young pastors, I'm excited and happy for the future of this movement."