

Unificationists celebrate Martin Luther King Day in Harlem, NY

Susan Bouachri and Steve Honey
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Susan Bouachri:

The AME Mt. Zion Church in Harlem recently celebrated its 90th birthday. The church building, which sponsors activity seven days a week, currently houses two church congregations as a neighboring church undertakes major renovation. Our director for the day, Donna, explained to us that Mt. Zion's mission includes offering after-school care for pre-K and elementary school kids, a food pantry and a soup kitchen two days a week. The soup kitchen serves about 200 meals per week. The neighborhood has come to depend on this vital community gathering place, housed in a building which has seen better days!



Donna explained that the building we'd come to clean was originally opened in the early 1920's as a bank. You could see remnants of its grand design in the marble staircase and detailed moulding around the vaulted ceiling. Two shifts of the National Ministry Team staff showed up with enthusiasm and elbow grease to clean and help the church prepare for their new year of feeding and churching others.

Kaye and Tal scrubbed pots and stovetops with steel wool for three hours in the afternoon, taking over from Olga and Jessica who scrubbed in the morning. Shizuko and I brought the marble stairway back to radiance with a thorough polishing. Riky and a volunteer from the UN named Sam mopped and cleaned following Sam's paint job. Yasu cleaned the chapel and sanctuary, assisted by Alia who sorted through Bibles and hymnals to bring order back to dog-eared pages. As the tallest, Steve took responsibility to clean walls in the kitchen.

This was the second year that members of the National Ministry Team set out to invest in the community on Martin Luther King Jr. Day. Dr. Ki Hoon Kim, Continental Director of Family Federation for World Peace and Unification (FFWPU) North America, encouraged us to go out and make a difference, saying, "You don't need to spend a lot of time creating your own project. Find someone who is already doing something and support them. Be sure to let them know who you are!" And that we did!



Steve Honey:

Five of us were schedule to help out Monday morning at the Mt. Zion A.M.E. Church at 116th Street and Madison in Harlem. We were schedule to help from 10:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. We stayed 'til 1:00, which was great because we got to overlap with the second team of five that arrived at 1:00. The project was organized by "Hunger Free America."

The church is very active. In addition to hosting two congregations (a Baptist church utilizes the facilities in the afternoon while their church is renovated), the church has a soup kitchen, a food pantry and a daycare program; so there's a lot of activity everyday.

Our job was to help with the annual deep cleaning. We scrubbed pots and pans, washed walls that had accumulated a year's worth of grease from all the fried food prepared in the kitchen, wiped down pews in the sanctuary, cleaned tables, swept, mopped and vacuumed. The lady from the church was really grateful for the support and said that everything looked brighter when we finished, as though they had added more lighting. The representative from Hunger Free America was appreciative as well and worked right along side us for both shifts. It felt great to give to the community.