

FFWPU USA: Meet Trailblazer Pastors Justin Okamoto and Eric White

Naokimi Ushiroda
November 29, 2021



Pastor Justin Okamoto, 30, Belvedere Family Church

This year ushered in new faces and fresh ideas for the Unification movement in the US, where a growing number of leaders are inspired young trailblazers. Meet Pastor Justin Okamoto of Belvedere, New York, and state leader and Pastor Eric White of Oklahoma. In their own words, they share about family, faith and their personal journeys, as well as the vision they have for their unique communities.

I get my joy finding innovative ways to do things.

As the new pastor of Belvedere Family Church, I aim to bring fresh energy, ideas and perspectives and create a community that people can be excited about. I want us to live up to what we believe in and I really want to develop a community where we can raise families and keep marriages strong. People need to feel valued, that they are being served and that our community is a place where they can raise their family. As a community, I want to do more to really create a space for our kids to feel safe, make friends, have fun, and develop their character and life of faith. Organizing a fundraiser for a [bouncy castle](#) and [church cleanup](#) of our parsonage in Tarrytown have been just some of the creative efforts toward this goal.

Belvedere is my home where I've been a member of this community since I was a small child.

I was born in Hoffman Estates, Illinois, before my family moved to New Jersey and then New York. My

parents are Japanese and Australian and have five kids total. I started working in ministry about eight years ago as the assistant pastor of Belvedere. I also worked at CARP headquarters for about a year during Rev. Naokimi's CARP presidency. I then spent four years in Japan as an English teacher and also started my own life coaching business there.

But I was at a crossroads.

I wasn't sure if I wanted to stay in Japan or go back to America. Then Rev. Naokimi became FFWPU national president and Dr. Yong became the regional president of North America. I came back to the U.S. in December 2020 unsure if I wanted to go all in with my life coaching business, or go into ministry. After talking with Rev. Naokimi, I was really inspired by what he said and what Dr. Yong was doing with Morning Devotion.

I wanted to inherit from these leaders and I thought maybe this was God's way of calling me back into ministry.

I started working part time at headquarters earlier this year with the online holy communities, then I became assistant pastor at Belvedere under Dr. Drissa Kone. I felt this was God calling me to do what I was originally inspired to do with my life. Dr. Kone has been a mentor to me but he is now working with the doctoral program at UTS. My wife Kazuka has been an amazing support in my journey. So has my family. All of my siblings are Blessed and there are four grandchildren, including my own two kids. We have a pretty big tribe at this point and it's great. As a father and pastor, I want to see all the kids of our community eventually develop their own life of faith, too, and do this in the most innovative ways possible.



Pastor Eric White, 30, Oklahoma Family Church

Working in law enforcement helped me to see the real transcending value of spiritual principles.

As a Sheriff's Deputy in Cleveland County, Oklahoma, I realize there is no law you can pass or anything you can physically do to solve all the evil and corruption in the world. Arresting people won't change anything. I came to this realization when I kept seeing a trend throughout my career. I arrested the same guy several weeks in a row, for example, and it was always for the same reason - a DUI. No matter what I was doing physically through my job, I couldn't change people's hearts and "save" them.

I believe the core values of the Unification movement, and the Divine Principle, is the only thing that will help people.

Living for the sake of others is the answer; there's no other way to save the world. I've lived in the city of Norman my whole life and we have a really small community here. My father was doing ocean providence on the East Coast before moving here after I was born. He's an American and my mom is from Germany. My older brother lives in Wisconsin and has two kids. The importance of family was the recurring theme that led me to rejoin the Unification movement. I had a really amazing childhood growing up - I couldn't have had a better childhood - but despite that, I left the church at age 16. I dated and married my girlfriend, then got divorced eight years later. In February 2020, I received the Marriage Blessing with my wonderful wife Junko, from Japan.

My driving force is knowing that nothing we do will ever matter if we don't get to where we need to be spiritual.

I became the youth and young adult pastor for about two years before I became the state leader and Pastor of Oklahoma Family Church. We have a few active members and families that regularly come to church; however, if everyone was active, we could probably quadruple our community turnout. So for me, I want to create incentives for people to be active and involved. There is value in coming to church and in being part of our movement, so I want to make people feel welcomed. I want to create that sense of community and experience of being valued by bringing a spark back and investing in the people here.

I think living for the sake of others means we should be uplifting each other so people can really feel valued and loved.

It's challenging to get young people motivated because they have a lot going on with school, friends and family. But I think when we practice what we preach and invest in something outside of ourselves, we see incredible outcomes. I organized a service project where we cleaned a women's shelter for those who have escaped domestic abuse, and a lot of people showed up! We recently had a Thanksgiving potluck as well to create a more open and inviting environment with fellowship, and we tripled our normal attendance. I'd like to do more service-based and community-oriented projects like that.

We are the Family Federation, and we should build that culture of family love and community at every level.

Our community is doing tribal messiahship and we have growing young families. I'm also developing more volunteer projects for the Oklahoma community. My wife and I are expecting our first child in February - a baby girl - and I think to myself, we must really do community outreach now so that the next generation will have a better experience in the future and a world that is better off.

Future Fund: Project Bouncy Castle



Justin Okamoto is organizing this fundraiser.

A wise person once said:

I believe the children are our future
Teach them well and let them lead the way



How true that is! As a community I want to do more to really create a space for our kids to feel safe, make friends, have fun, and develop their character and life of faith. What does a bouncy castle have to do with that? Well, everything!

I remember all the struggles that I went through growing up and I always find myself thinking, all of this could have been avoided if Belvedere just had a bouncy castle growing up. Okay, I'm joking, but I do honestly believe one of the most beautiful noises in the universe are children's laughter and one of the most beautiful things to see is children playing and getting along together. Let's make that possible together!

I'm fundraising so that we can buy a nice bouncy castle for the Belvedere Family Community Sunday School. We are currently preparing for our first one-day kids workshop where we are inviting kids from all over the Tri-State area (NY, NJ, CT) to join together. We already have about 30 kids registered to come.

If you have the heart to support please do!

This is the link to the castle we want to buy.

www.amazon.com/Bounceland-Inflatable-Bounce-House-Bouncer/dp/B003WY6YQ0/ref=sr_1_5?crd=3NBV3AY38E73L&dchild=1&keywords=bounce+house&qid=1635209203&qsid=141-3669204-7289422&prefix=bounce+house%2Caps%2C167&sr=8-5&sres=B003WY6YQ0%2CB003NSBMUI%2CB002RXHW65%2CB08FCKLDG%2CB0100R3MVQ%2CB001EHJ7GG%2CB08NSM9T3W%2CB00BGRJ3U%2CB07Q5FBZS9%2CB002H042AK%2CB08G

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Created August 19th, 2021

Justin Okamoto

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Details

Updates

Hello brothers and sisters! This is pastor Justin, the new pastor of the Belvedere Family Community. I'm here to ask for your help in creating a home for our community that can serve our members and the greater community!

Our parsonage, a historic white house at 548 S Broadway Tarrytown NY, has served our community and movement in many ways under various different leaders. She has given of herself completely and selflessly and now is experiencing some severe burnout. Our once beautiful white house has started turning a little gray and is in need of a makeover.

Before Covid hit, the house had previously served many different functions. It was a place where our staff would meet, we had our council meetings there, many times the youth ministry would use it as a

place to host sleepovers for the staff, many received counseling or met with the pastor there for some spiritual guidance. It was also a place where we had DP seminars, Blessing seminars, and other forms of education.

As the Covid situation starts to shift and we prepare to open up again I hope that the White House can once again be a place for our youth, young adults, Kodan members, and all other members of the community to feel free to host activities and build a loving home for our community and beyond.

On August 28th we will have an all day clean up effort at the white house. We will be gathering upwards of 20+ people to help in the effort. We need these funds to cover the cost of the clean up and feeding volunteers. Any additional funding will go towards beautification of the house and lawn.

Cost Breakdown:

\$550 to rent a dumpster

\$250 to feed volunteers and keep them hydrated

\$400 for cleaning supplies, equipment rental, paint supplies

If you cannot donate funds there are other ways to contribute. If you have unused cleaning supplies that are in good condition (brooms, mops, gloves, detergents, etc) we can accept those. Also if you have time we are more than happy to have you come and dedicated a few hours to the whole day Aug 28th to come help out. Just let me know at okamotomiak@gmail.com

Thank you so much for your support!

Pastor Justin and the BFC Team

[Donate Now](#)

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Link:

<http://ffnd.co/DtZbYh>

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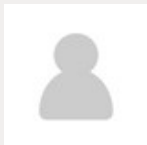
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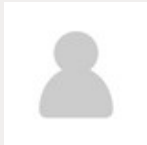
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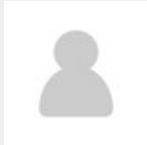


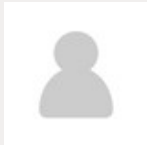
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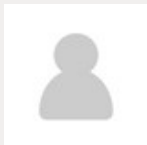
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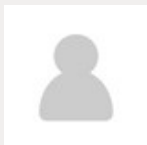
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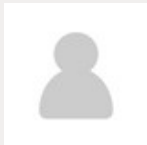
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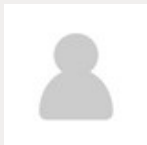
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