

In Jin Moon addresses Third Annual Commencement Gala

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In her keynote address, Rev. In Jin Moon encouraged young Unificationists not only to achieve academic excellence, but also to give back to their families.

More than 500 Unificationists, young and young at heart, celebrated the end to yet another academic year in the Grand Ballroom of the Manhattan Center for the Third Annual Commencement Gala on Friday, June 15, 2012. Graduates included young men and women from high school, college, higher education and Unification Church programs such as the Generation Peace Academy (GPA), Next Generation Academy (NGA) and Oceania Leadership Training (OLT). Doors for the gala opened at 6:00 p.m., presenting tables laden with finger food varying from coconut shrimp to cupcakes, and at 7:00 p.m., Master of Ceremonies Seijin Tranberg greeted attendees with welcoming remarks.

In an interview with Unificationnews.com, Tranberg said, “I’ve been in China for four months studying Chinese language, culture and foreign policy, and therefore, coming back was so refreshing. I feel that ever since I’ve come back, I’ve been returning to my roots and soaking my spiritual heritage back in. Spiritual life is somewhat absent in China, where minority religions are forced to worship in “underground churches,” and I felt that my roots really dug deep at the gala in that I was reminded of this incredible family that I am, and have been, a part of. The crowd felt very excited, very energized because everyone was naturally happy to see each other, but also very responsive as an audience. I felt a lot of support from them in bringing out a very authentic and real family to celebrate such a precious evening. I’m just so happy to be back and I felt so embraced, welcomed, and loved, as I’m sure our Heavenly Parent did as well.”



The Generation Peace Academy Choir performed several numbers, including "Somebody to Love."

Entertainment for the evening included musical numbers from the *Junction Band*, the *Ohio Band*, the *GPA Choir* and *Sonic Cult*, who was cheered back on stage for an encore. In addition, GPA graduates performed a Swing-, Chacha- and Foxtrot routine. Second-year GPA graduate Sarah Lea introduced keynote speaking Rev. In Jin Moon, who then uplifted her audience with the message of giving back (see speech below).

After her address, Rev. In Jin Moon welcomed young Unificationists who were recognized for their academic achievements onstage and took photos with graduates from various schools and church programs. The rest of the program involved ballroom dancing until the early hours of the morning.

“We had 530 people attend the event. I was really worried at first because we had an action-packed program and it seemed like there was maybe too much going on,” said Event Manager Ester Allen. “But the evening had really high energy and was actually really fun. I felt that we stepped up the quality of everything this year, including the room's set up, the entertainment and the awesome food. I really wanted

the event to feel classy and top notch but with bits that were whimsical and fun. I think a lot of people had a great time, and I've heard a lot of positive feedback. I'm so grateful we could have *Sonic Cult* perform, because not only were they incredible, but they also gave us something to be excited about with their message of being proud of who we are. When they came out on stage, the crowd was psyched to hear them. I love that our Commencement Gala is not only an alternative to Prom, but also gives us a chance to congratulate all the remarkable achievements of the members of our community.”



Graduates of high school, college, higher education and various Unification Church programs had the opportunity to take pictures with Rev. In Jin Moon at the gala.

Remarks from Rev. In Jin Moon

“Welcome to Manhattan Center! Congratulations to all the graduates who have come together to celebrate Commencement in 2012. I feel so young sitting behind stage, watching all the performances and so proud that we can celebrate all of your success and achievement together as a family.

“I just came back from Japan, where I got to spend some time together with the brothers and sisters there, and we shared a moment together through the Youth Concert for World Peace and Ideal Families. I've been going there for the last 12 years and in the course of those 12 years, these children have become beautiful, almost professional choirs that are worthy of becoming Japan's pride. They are many times asked to perform for VIPs and have been invited to embassy row. I thought it was quite interesting how even though Japan is a country where our True Father still cannot go, it cannot help but recognize the beauty, the grace, the professionalism of our community. Because you guys are just that. All of you, each and every one of you, are that unique handiwork of God, our Heavenly Parent. And none of us would be here if our True Parents weren't here. So in a way, we need to be always grateful to our Heavenly Parent and also to our True Parents who really made us flesh, made us manifest, who gave us an opportunity to do something great with our lives. So as you go on to graduate and continue in terms of academic excellence, career planning, spiritual and emotional growth, please think about where you come from. Please think about honoring those who have gone before you.

“When I spent time with those Japanese brothers and sisters, they are so envious of you in America. Because they got to see video clips of GPA, of sports festivals, of different galas, and you all look so handsome and beautiful in them. So many of you have won awards for the 4.0 club, and many great accomplishments are being had each and every year. Of course, I as the senior pastor, and all of your parents, are applauding at the sidelines. But you need to know that you have also all the brothers and sisters in Japan who are envious of you in a good way.



Master of Ceremonies Seijin Tranberg welcomed his audience to the Commencement Gala.

Supporting Our Japanese Brothers and Sisters

“I realized that in Japan, unlike in the United States, our brothers and sisters are going through a lot of difficulty. As you know, I've been working with my brothers on the faith-breaking issue. We were able to

make some headway because we were able to ask some US politicians to put the right kind of pressure on the Japanese government, to not just sit and call it a ‘family matter’ when people are being abused emotionally, spiritually, physically and sexually.



Sonic Cult performed several original songs such as "Great Escape" and "You Own the Game."

“But another thing that has been taking place on Japanese campuses that I want to alert our community to, is that CARP has been fighting a lonely battle. We have professors and deans of universities and colleges targeting our students who are trying to be proud Unificationists on campus. I heard numerous testimonies about these courageous men and women who are not going to take it lying down anymore. There was this one CARP leader, who was singled out in one of her classes by the professor, who started talking about mass weddings. The professor said that the mass wedding her parents attended as Unificationists are for dogs. When she heard this, she said that perhaps in the past, we as good Christians have turned the other cheek, but that now the time is ripe for us to find our self-dignity, own it, and be proud of who we are. So she started fighting back. And different CARP chapters on different college campuses around Japan also decided to do something.

“As representing America, I told CARP leaders in Japan that they don’t have to fight alone. Just as they don’t have to fight alone on the faith-breaking issue, they shouldn’t have to fight alone on their college campuses. Every university in Japan has an affiliation with a sister university in the United States. The only thing that CARP members need to do is to check if we have any CARP students who are trying to withstand the abuse on campus and let them know that we are willing to help. We can use this sister-affiliation relationship between schools to exert pressure. We can even send our CARP US brothers and sisters to Japan to help organize rallies, raise awareness, and highlight the abuse that’s taking place. If a professor of a university in America said such a thing – first of all, that professor would be fired. And secondly, that professor would have to issue a public and private apology to the. But none of this is being done in Japan right now. Therefore, tonight is an opportunity not only to celebrate our achievements here in the US, but also to think of how we are always connected to a larger family. Because we have the opportunity to pursue our dreams and careers here in the United States, we should not forget that many of our brothers and sisters in different countries are still fighting for that right. No Unificationists in the world need to fight alone.



The Ohio Band was one of the two second-generation Unificationist bands to take the stage.

“Not only does a Japanese university have an affiliation or sister relationship with an American university, but it is also affiliated with different universities in different parts of the world. So, in essence, we can tie universities around the world together to help Japan. I’ve heard horrendous stories where people are waiting in bathroom stalls to throw baskets of eggs at our students, how garbage has been stuffed into their lockers and desks, how one boy’s head was stuffed into a toilet bowl and flushed over and over again. These are the things that have taken place. But I told our Japanese brothers and sisters, ‘Document it! Take pictures! Start a blog! Start mass-emailing! Don’t just sit in silence! Fight back! Fight for your dignity! Be a proud Unificationist!’ We all have a right to a decent education and to dignity. Human dignity.



Graduates of the Generation Peace Academy, the Blessed Teens Academy, Next Generation Academy and Oceania Leadership Training cozied up for a picture.

Giving Back to God, True Parents and Family

“So, as we move forward to university, some of you might face these abuses and atrocities. I certainly have, in my academic career. But if we work together, talk about it with our larger family, put our power behind it, there are incredible accomplishments that can be made. I’ve always talked about internal and external excellence. If we, having inherited the spiritual foundation that was granted to all of us by our Heavenly Parent and our True Parents, continue on that journey of developing ourselves spiritually and emotionally, then we can become internally strong people. But I also highlight the importance of finding and committing to that passion and bringing out that masterpiece in each and every one of you. One of you might be the greatest lawyer that is to come in the future. Another one sitting might be a great scientist who might give Albert Einstein a run for his money. There might be, sitting in the audience, a Picasso in the making.



Many attendees considered ballroom dancing with their friends and families the highlight of the event.

“There is nothing that you cannot accomplish because you have already been touched by God. You are divine sons and daughters of God. Get the finest education you possibly can, but don’t just go to the best universities so you can sit there, high above everybody else, feeling smart, with the alphabet soup behind your name. That is not the reason we be the best that we can be. The reason that we want to be valedictorian, win that award, represent our community well, make our lives something worthy of being respected is because the ultimate goal of being the best we can be is to give back to you family. To God, to True Parents, and to our community.



Second-year Generation Peace Academy graduates Natasha Honey and August Lindsay showed off their moves on the dance floor.

“Even as you move through the academic ladder and go through high school, graduate valedictorian, go

to college, graduate valedictorian, go to a Master's program and PhD program and write a great paper that might be published because it's so cutting edge, don't forget the importance of service. Don't forget the importance of giving back to your community. If you go to Harvard law school, be the editor-in-chief of the *Harvard Law Review*. But in your summers, or by maybe taking a year off, give back to your community. Always bring back home the great accomplishments, because without the firm home base, without your parents in place, without the people who really love and nurtured you, you might not have been able to accomplish those things. Move forward! But always remember to give thanks back – to Heavenly Father, to True Parents, to our parents, and to the community.



The line for the photo booth extended for the entire length of the Grand Ballroom for much of the night as attendees eagerly waiting to pose in front of the lenses.

“If we keep on doing this, with every year and every generation, our movement is going to be quite incredible. I've seen the way you've turned your lives around in the last few years. You guys are incredible. You guys are phenomenal. You guys are beautiful. You guys are handsome. You guys don't need people who wish you well just to make you feel good. Hear them from people who love you. Hear them from your family who believe in you. And believe in yourself. Because if you do, then there is no limit to what you can accomplish.



Participants of the gala ballroom danced past midnight, until the early hours of the morning.

“In a way, GPA going to Korea and winning the award is just the beginning. More and more exciting things are going to take place. As I promised to the Youth Concert in Japan, one of the things I really want to see happen are these youth concerts to happen all over the world, so that when we have one here, it's not just the US that's represented. Perhaps we can have Russia represented. And when we go to Japan, it's not just the Japanese children represented – it's the whole global community. That way, our community is going to be a freakin' exciting community, isn't it?”

“Please keep on the path, be passionate about your life, and devote yourself to that passion with all you might. Don't forget to come home and share your achievements with you community. I know our True Parents wish you so much success and love. So, continue on, and be those beautiful and great eternal sons and daughters of God. Thank you.”