

Bus Tour: From the Civil Rights Movement to the Deep, Deep South

Michael Balcomb
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Annie Abrams speaks to those gathered at the Capitol building in Little Rock, Arkansas.

“As you travel these 48 states, continue to be the witness to God’s plans and God’s word,” Dr. Annie Mable McDaniel Abrams told the participants of the God’s Hope for America bus tour on July 3 in Little Rock, Arkansas. Dr. Abrams, an 82-year-old retired educator and political, social, civic and community activist, was being honored at the Arkansas State Capitol for her lifetime of service to civil rights and the state of Arkansas.



The God's Hope for America tour makes a stop at the Little Rock Capitol building

In 1957, Dr. Abrams was a supporter of the Little Rock Nine, the first African-American students to integrate the all-white Little Rock Central High School. She told Elizabeth Eckford, the first of the nine teenagers to attempt to enter the school, "If you can succeed here, you will make a huge difference."

In more recent years Dr. Abrams was instrumental in campaigns to rename Little Rock streets in honor of Martin Luther King Jr. as well as civil rights notables Daisy Bates and Mayor Charles Bussey. She also was a leader in the campaign to institute Little Rock’s Martin Luther King Jr. Day parade.

“Traveling through this part of the country, we are becoming more and more aware of unfinished business,” said Michael Balcomb, president of FFWPU USA, who is leading the bus pilgrimage. “Today we have heard from a local icon of the civil rights movement, Dr. Annie McDaniel Abrams. She has reminded us of the injustices still being perpetrated in this nation, and exhorted us to serve more.”

The God’s Hope for America tour presented Dr. Abrams with a tour kit complete with one of every outreach and souvenir item. She happily accepted the T-shirt, saying she has collected over 200 shirts that represent movements

of service and this one makes 201. Dr. Abrams told the tour participants: “You can't retire from service. You are serving around the clock.” She asked, "Have you rendered any service today?"

As Dr. Abrams promised that she will pray for the success of the tour for the entirety of its run, we encourage our community to also connect to her on Facebook. She is truly one of many people who make God’s Hope for America possible.

As the bus continues through the South, Dr. Balcomb summed up the civil rights lessons the tour participants have learned so far. “Yesterday we stopped by the National Civil Rights Museum in Memphis, Tennessee, and said a prayer for Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. right at the Lorraine Motel where he was gunned down at the age of 39. When our founder, Rev. Sun Myung Moon, first visited Arkansas and all the 48 continental states in 1965, he prayed for the healing of American families, the unity of all religions, and the end of racial division. The work of Dr. King and of Rev. Moon may be unfinished, but our generation is proud to stand today with heroes like Annie and declare that together, we will build that dream.”

Jackson, Mississippi

After a three-hour drive, the tour arrived at the Mississippi Holy Ground, located in the Jackson Zoological Park. The two Unificationist families living in Jackson greeted the bus riders, joined by two Unificationist-born youth from Tennessee and one first-generation Unificationist from Atlanta.



(Left)Tour participants, local families and guests share a potluck picnic in Jackson (Right) The small group in Jackson, Mississippi gathers at the Holy Ground to pray

Gary Chidester, pastor to District 5, had joined the bus in Arkansas and opened the Holy Ground ceremony with a prayer for the South, a part of America and God’s heart that needs to be liberated. “The strife of brother against brother needs to be redeemed here,” he prayed. Gary also shared stories about his time with True Father there in 1974, and a Unificationist brother from the Congo who came to the United States in 2000 recalled how True Father’s 50-state tour in 2001 changed his life forever. His experience with True Father in Mississippi instilled in him the heart to make sure there was always something going on in Mississippi for God and True Parents.

Everyone present prayed for the growth of this small community and blessings for this state. Afterward they shared a convivial picnic with the local community.

Jackson Photo Gallery on Facebook. As with the God’s Hope for America page on Facebook, you can tag your friends in pictures and share the posts to help spread the word online as the bus spreads the word on the road!

New Orleans, Louisiana



Music is shared and enjoyed at the 800-year-old oak tree marking the New Orleans Holy Ground

The landscape from Jackson to New Orleans changed drastically, from lush green grass to bayous and the unique vegetation of Louisiana. The drive across America has been anything but boring, and True Father must have experienced much the same astonishment and inspiration at the ever-changing landscape.



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The three Unificationist families living in New Orleans met the bus at the Louisiana Holy Ground, which is located in New Orleans' City Park and is marked by an 800-year-old live oak tree. John Monestere, pastor in New Orleans, greeted Unificationists and guests from throughout Louisiana. Reverend John Moon Kasongo, who had added True Father's name to his to show people the impact that he had on his life, joined from a nearby university. The father-daughter team of Wendell and Yoshiko Miller offered the song "How Great It Is to Be Loved by You." Mrs. Elisandra Kasongo prayed about how great it is to be loved by our Heavenly Parent. Dr. Michael Balcomb told the participants that we should make the footprints that we leave during this tour and afterward last like the footprints of a dinosaur.

New Orleans Photo Gallery on Facebook. As with the God's Hope for America page on Facebook, you can tag your friends in pictures and share the posts to help spread the word online as the bus spreads the word on the road!

Independence Day

The last day of this mini-tour, July 4, was an occasion for celebrating America as part of the God's Hope for America tour, and the bus found itself in Alabama that day.