

Blessing 2012 Gathers Media Attention Across the Nation

Yoshie Manaka and Doug Burton
March 26, 2012

Unificationists put on a bold celebration of their signature wedding style at satellite wedding celebrations in five U.S. locations on March 23, 2012.



The satellite Blessing was held with style at Grand Ballroom of Manhattan Center (MC). 43 couples along with 320 family members and friends celebrated a historic nuptial event.

As church members around the world watched via the internet the main Blessing Ceremony at Gapyeong, Korea approximately 30 television media and wire services, including the BBC, Reuters and the British-based ITN (Independent Television News) covered the event, including FOX news and the British Independent News Source (ITN). News of the Unification Church marriage blessing of 2,500 couples was printed in countless online news services, featuring clouds of confetti and happy couples.

Stateside, the blessing celebrations were unlike any previous ceremonies due to a nationwide media outreach campaign.



Jacob McCarthy and Kyoko Edwards sit alongside Daniel Franklin and Priya D'silva, sharing their joyful union with almost 200 community members in Los Angeles

In New York, the satellite Blessing was held with style at the Manhattan Center (MC). In the MC's Grand Ballroom 43 couples along with 320 family members and friends celebrated a historic nuptial event. Reporting teams on hand included the Dallas-based *Ester Davis Talk Show*, the Religion News Service, *Foreign-Policy* magazine, the Tokyo Broadcasting System (TBS) and the Japanese-language *Weekly Business News*.

The Los Angeles Lovin' Life community held a beautiful ceremony as well, according to Pastor George Kazakos. Almost 200 people watched as eight couples pledged themselves to one another. "We had our own local program, along with the broadcast from Korea," said Kazakos. "We had a little procession, live entertainment, and a catered meal. The general feeling was very uplifting and inspiring."

Thanks to media outreach, the *Pasadena Star News*, a major daily newspaper in the Los Angeles area, included the Unification Church Blessing ceremony to an article that highlighted religious celebrations in the area.



Joseph Rueter and Jina Dishman laugh together in their local wedding celebration

Era Thompson, who organizes the media outreach team in Los Angeles said, “The guidance and press kit content we received from headquarters were very helpful. Ariana Moon and Doug Burton coached us a lot, and we were able to put a local spin on the content they gave us. What we’ve learned is that the media that respond are ones we built a personal relationship with, so I think this campaign was a really good start. We learned what needs to be done, and we have to continue building better relationships with them.”

In the San Francisco area, the Blessing ceremony was held at Shimjung Gardens. “Everything came off wonderfully,” said Rev. Kevin Thompson. “The weather was simply gorgeous after threatening to rain all week. The opportunity to take wedding pictures with a backdrop of San Francisco and the Golden Gate Bridge was a gift from God. We really felt like we were participating live rather than watching a prepared video.”

Nine couples attended in total, with five second-generation couples, and four first generation attendees. “No one wanted to leave afterwards, which is always one of my tests for a good event!” Thompson continued, “It was all so wonderful and holy and filled with joy. We wish the whole world could have experienced it with us.”

Smaller but high-spirited ceremonies were held in Chicago, Denver and Washington, D.C. according to field ministers. For the first time, the marriage blessing was on the Associated Press Daybook in Washington, D.C. and New York City, and radio reports of the blessing were broadcast in larger cities coast to coast.

Press conferences for local media had been held in Los Angeles, New York, and Washington, D.C. in the days prior to the marriage blessing. The whole effort was a team-building experience and an educational effort for U.S. media," said Doug Burton, Unification Church Public Affairs Director. “Follow-up stories are still coming in,” he added.