

Unificationists across the US will gather in 40 locations to celebrate the Marriage Blessing

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There will be wine, unison vows, a procession down a grand staircase, dinner and dancing. There will be wall of men in tuxedos and a sea of white wedding gowns. The wine will be holy, the ballroom music sublime and the marriage will be for thousands. What else could it be but love and romance Unification style 2013?

Thousands of Unificationists across the United States will gather in 40 locations on Saturday February 16, 2013 to celebrate the "Marriage Blessing," also known this year as "Cosmic Blessing," the signature mass wedding event of the Unification Movement. The largest gathering in the United States will take place in New Jersey at The Grove, the premier wedding venue in Cedar Grove, New Jersey, just 30 minutes away from New York City. At least 50 couples, most of them young adults, will be exchanging wedding vows as 350 guests observe the memorable rite of passage.

The event will be simultaneously telecast to 160 nations from the central event in Gapyeong, Korea, where 50,000 well-wishers will gather to cheer on 3,500 couples exchanging vows in a stadium

"We are so excited to be going to the Blessing," says Kester Wilkening, 21, from Bowie, Maryland, who will graduate from Cornell University this May.

He continues: "For us, it is important to continue the marriage tradition of the Blessing because it is such a powerful sacrament and actualization of God's love. Through the Blessing, we can establish a God-centered marriage of trust, support, and love. This becomes a launching point for us to create a joy-filled family, and venture out to lead passionate professional careers. Our families are very excited for us and continue to be our biggest supporters. Going through the Matching process helped us learn about the little things that make up who we are, as well as the big things." His soon to be bride Jana Ipparraguirre, 21 of Clifton, New Jersey says, that the two met by accident at a Cornell ballroom dance class. The odds were strongly against two Unification Church members meeting accidentally in a student body of 30,000, but that is what happened.

The live broadcast from Gapyeong, Korea at will start at 9:00 p.m (EST).

The event at The Grove will include uplifting education on the meaning of the blessing, a couple's communion ceremony (for first-generation Unificationists), known as the Holy Wine Ceremony, a sumptuous celebration dinner, entertainment, official couple photos, and a celebration with dancing following the marriage ceremony.

"In the 60 year history of the Unification Church, the most central tenet and unchanging value is the sanctity of marriage, and the institution through which we seek to create God-centered families," says Rev. Philip Schanker, director of Blessed Family Ministry at Unification Church USA, on the meaning of the Blessing ceremony after the year Rev. Moon has passed and on the eve of Foundation Day. "Through God-centered families we can create a peaceful world, the Kingdom of Heaven, the world of love God intended," he explained.

According to Rev. Schanker, of the couples from the United States participating in the blessing ceremony either stateside or in Korea, 70 couples will be matched second generation Unificationists; 30 will be matched first generation church members, and 40 couples will be previously married couples who are rededicating their vows.

This year the event is designed to be more personal, more intimate, and more romantic than previous ceremonies, he tells Unification News.

"Many people expected that Rev. Moon's passing would herald the end of the movement or its momentum. But the fact that so many couples – thousands if not tens of thousands -- are coming together around the world is an important statement about the lasting nature of the values he upheld," he added.