



UNIFICATION CHURCH USA  
HOLY SPIRIT ASSOCIATION FOR THE UNIFICATION OF WORLD CHRISTIANITY

## As Millions Say “No” to Marriage, Unificationists Say “I Do”

Contact: Douglas Burton  
February, 12, 2013  
Media relations HSA UWC

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**



According to the U.S. Census Bureau, marriage is in decline: Barely half of adults (51 percent) were married in 2011 compared with 72 percent in 1960. Yet, among Unificationists, marriage is blooming. Approximately 50 Unificationist couples will gather in New Jersey on Saturday, February 16, 2013 to celebrate the “Marriage Blessing,” the signature mass wedding event of the Unification Movement. These couples will exchange wedding vows at The Grove, the premier wedding venue in Cedar Grove, New Jersey, as hundreds of guests observe the memorable rite of passage.

The ceremony will be simultaneously telecast to 17 locations in the United States and 194 nations worldwide at 9:00 p.m. (EST) from the central event in Gapyeong, Korea, where 50,000 well-wishers will cheer on the 3,500 couples exchanging vows.



“We are so excited to be going to the Blessing,” says Kester Wilkening, 22, 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. This becomes a launching point for us to create a joy-filled family and venture out to lead passionate, professional careers.”

Wilkening’s soon-to-be bride, age 21, of Clifton, New Jersey adds, “Our families are very excited for us and continue to be our biggest supporters.” The two met at Cornell University, and after their parents introduced the idea of each other as potential spouses, decided to commit to each other.

The event at The Grove will include information on the meaning of the Blessing, a “Holy Wine Ceremony,” a celebration dinner, entertainment, official couple photos and 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,” says Rev. Phillip Schanker, director of Blessed Family Ministry at Unification Church USA. “Through God-centered families we can create a peaceful world, the Kingdom of Heaven, the world of love God intended.”

## A Matching Testimony: Kester Wilkening and His Bride

Edited by Ariana Moon

*The following is a humorous and touching testimony from second-generation Unificationist Kester Wilkening and his bride about their experience getting “Matched” with the support of their parents. Having transferred from Cornell University, the bride is currently a sophomore at university and Kester is a senior at Cornell University, expected to graduate this spring with a degree in Civil Engineering. A resident of Clifton, New Jersey, the bride works as the communications coordinator for the Unification Church in Clifton and Kester is completing his undergraduate degree at Cornell University. They plan to attend the Marriage Blessing Ceremony on February 16, 2013 at The Grove in New Jersey along with 49 other couples.*



Kester Wilkening and his bride will be tying the knot on February 16, 2013, at the national celebration of the Cosmic Blessing in New Jersey.

**Bride:** When I got to Cornell in Fall of 2010 as a freshman, I was really excited to try-out for the ballroom team and to connect with the local Unificationist community that I had heard so much about. I think try-outs were the first Friday, and then that Sunday was the first gathering of the new school year of Unificationists in the area. Both the tryouts and that Sunday went really well, and I was feeling good! I got the news that I had made it onto Cornell’s ballroom team and was asked to attend an info session where I would meet the dance partner assigned to me by the team’s captains. I went and found out that I had been assigned to Kester Wilkening.

**Kester:** I came back as a sophomore from taking a year off from Cornell, and I was excited to re-join the ballroom dance team, with which I had danced before I left. For some reason, I had missed the first Sunday service as well as the try-outs for the ballroom dance team (both of which the bride was at). I went to the first team meeting, where the captains are going to announce the partners they have assigned to people who didn’t already have one (which included me). I met my partner for the first time. I then told her, “I’m sorry but I can’t make it to our first competition, because I’ll be in Korea.” When she asked why, I said: “Oh, my church is hosting an international sports competition, and I’m going to play soccer in it.”

**Bride:** At this point, I started connecting dots. What other church organizes an international sports competition? So I asked, “Are you a part of the Unification Church?”

**Kester:** I thought, “How does she know?” and responded, “Uh, yeah...”

**Bride:** “Me too!”

### “The Rest Is History”

**Bride:** Before going off to college, I had had a semi-serious talk with my mom about the “qualifications” my future husband had to meet: 1) he had to be a part of the Unification Church, 2) he had to be smart, and 3) he had to *at least* like to dance. Then I meet Kester, who, 1) is a part of the Unification Church, 2) goes to Cornell and 3) is on the ballroom team! Bam! Instant-crush, hello!

The initial shock/crush wave died down in a week, and I became good friends with Kester. We spent a lot of time together dancing, driving to ballroom competitions and hanging out.

**Kester:** In the spring of 2011, after two semesters of dancing with the bride, I realized that I had started to have feelings for her. We were spending a lot of one-on-one time together during practice, I was getting to know her more, and I found that I “liked” her. Duh. Once I recognized this, I thought, “OK, she’s my sister. She’s in my friend-zone, and I’d like it to stay that way. I’ll just stop dancing for a while.” Of

course I did not tell my bride about my feelings, and I quit the ballroom dance team.

One year later, on July 1, 2012, my bride asked me to perform a waltz with her at our parents 30th anniversary Gala in the Manhattan Center in New York City (only in our church do so many people have the same anniversary!). Before we walked on stage, co-emcee Jaga Gavin, introduced us as a “beautiful young couple.” Blushing, we took the stage, knowing that after our waltz the entire audience was going to think we were Matched and that we would have to explain that we were most definitely *not*. Then, after our dance, co-emcee Victoria Roomet proceeded to tell the audience the story of how we met, ending it with the comment: “And the rest is history!”

**Bride:** If anyone had doubts about us *not* being Matched, those doubts were squashed by those five words! Jaga and Victoria had effectively made us a “couple” in front of 700+ people!

**Kester:** And that’s the night our parents first started talking about Matching the two of us together (while my bride and I had no idea). That night, she and I both went home and posted on our Facebook profiles: “Public service announcement: No, I’m not matched.”

### **The Pre-Engagement**

**Kester:** A month later, I was serving as the director of seven-day Family Camp for Unificationist families at Shehaqua, Hickory Run State Park, PA. I was in “director mode,” getting stressed out, and my bride was one of the few people that could get me to lighten up, laugh and relax. I realized I still had feelings for her, so I talked to my mom in an effort to try to let my feelings go, without any agenda of “I want to be Matched,” simply trying to keep my heart centered and my motivations pure. I made an effort not to talk to my bride the rest of the week.

My mom, without my knowledge, then casually chatted with my bride, at one point asking her not-so subtly, “What are you looking for in your future Match?” my bride told my mom a few of her main points (“driven, emotionally aware, educated, has a solid personal relationship with God, and if he can dance that’s a total plus”), and my mom, thinking of my personality, mentally went “Check, check, check.”

**Kester:** During Thanksgiving break, a few months after my first Matching process ended, my parents introduced an anonymous Matching profile to me. In the first process, I and the other woman had mutually decided that it was best for us to not get Matched because we couldn’t trust each other’s level of commitment. Three days after my parents introduced the anonymous profile, I woke up and realized the person was my bride. While talking to my parents, I said, “Well, one year ago, in the beginning of my first matching process, her name came up and I said ‘No way’ because I didn’t think she was mature enough or wanted to think about the Matching. Since then, I’ve seen her grow a lot, and now I can see her as a much more real possibility. Yes, I’d like to talk to her.” After that, my people called her people, and my bride agreed to talk.

**Bride:** I had a feeling that our first conversation, later that night, would be a little awkward. We’ve been friends for a while, but now we were “talking.” I was not disappointed; it was very awkward. The next day, we talked to each other again, and it was definitely our first “real” conversation.

After talking for a week, we decide to do a 21-day prayer condition together. Our purpose for the condition was to center our hearts on God and True Parents, bring joy to God, see each other as brother and sister during this pre-matching time, be honest with each other and see each other for who he/she is and not who we want him/her to be. Before Christmas, we decided to spend time with each other’s families. Kester drove down from Cornell on the 14th and spent a week with me and my family in New Jersey.

**Kester:** Through a great deal of effort, we created an emotional space where we each felt the freedom to say “yes” or “no.” After *lots* of prayer and consideration of major points (faith, family, career, values, etc.), we both feel serious, God-centered and committed about this Matching. On Monday, December 17th, I wake up, determined to step up my commitment. I feel in my bones that this Matching is right. I pray, reflect and have the same feeling. At lunch that day with her dad, I ask him, “If I ask my bride to marry me on Friday, would that be OK with you?” He says yes. The next day, we go to design and buy the engagement ring. We left for Maryland that Wednesday.

### **The Proposal**

**Kester:** On Thursday evening, the ring was finally completed. The catch? I had to propose the next evening, though I was sick with mono, and I had no idea where I would be taking my bride for the proposal. Earlier, I texted an older couple, asking them for super-nice places near the Annapolis, MD, downtown harbor. At 10 p.m. I get their response: Ruth’s Chris five-star steakhouse. I make a quick decision to make the reservation, trusting that all will be OK. The morning of the proposal, my brother Teo drove to meet her dad and sister, Papa Pablo and Isabel, to meet up and pass on the ring.

**Bride:** We were in Bowie, MD for the last few days of our prayer condition, and Kester wanted to take me out to celebrate that day, Friday, December 21st, as the last day of our prayer condition (or so I thought). As I was getting ready for dinner, I notice a note under my cell phone. I pick it up, wondering what it was. It said, “#18: I love your gorgeous face, especially when you breathe deeply and are at peace with the world.” That gets me to look around the room some more, and I realized there are notes everywhere, I felt like I was a part of a movie! On my laptop, in a shoe, on the desk and more! When we got to Ruth’s Chris, throughout dinner more of these cards are dropped off by our waiter. In total there were 21 notes, with #21 saying “I love... you.” At the end, an empty wine glass holding an iPhone came out playing “I Won’t Give Up” by Jason Mraz, which was “our” song because it had a great message, fit our story and we had planned to sing it at our Matching ceremony. We left the restaurant and walked to this alcove along the harbor and sit on a bench there.

**Kester:** The waterfront was beautiful, she was beautiful...

**Bride:** Then Kester off-handedly says, “I didn’t want to propose in the restaurant, because I wanted it to be between me, you and God.” That’s when I realized what was actually going on. He came in front of me and knelt on one knee, pulled out the ring and proposed! I said (squealed) “Yes!” Once we got back to his house, we Skyped with my family who had all kept the proposal a secret!

“Since then, we have returned to school and are continuing with a 40-Day prayer and reading condition via Skype. We are so excited to be going to the Blessing. 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 could establish a God-centered marriage of trust, support, and love. This became 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.”