

## Anne Iparraguirre Announces a New Congregation in Elizabeth, New Jersey

Edited by Doug Burton

April 10, 2013



*The new family church shows the colors of the rainbow*

A new congregation has been started in Elizabeth, N.J. as of February 2013. The lead pastor is Pastor Greg Agulan, a native of the Philippines, a graduate of the Unification Theological Seminary (2000) and a resident of Elizabeth. "The Elizabeth Family Church is a place where many members of the congregation, young and old, can express their creativity through giving sermons, developing programs, teaching Divine Principle, making music together and getting to know each other to express the love of God in community," according to Dr. Anne Iparraguirre, the District Pastor.

Different ministries are already blooming, giving members and new guests plenty of ways to share our life during the week as well. Volunteers from the congregation are teaching Divine Principle in English, Spanish and Portuguese, martial arts, ballroom dance and piano lessons.

Three different people have given the Sunday sermon, one from the Philippines, one from the Congo and one from Brazil – all seminary graduates. After powerful music and a thoughtful message, the community shares a meal and enjoys fellowship over homemade food. The Sunday School, led by Doris DeSouza and taught by high-school and older second-generation Unificationists, provides an exciting and rewarding time for children of all ages.

"There is so much talent and creativity just waiting to be expressed and shared with friends and neighbors as well as our own families. That's what Family Church looks like, feels like and sounds like," according to an emailed report from Dr. Iparraguirre.



*"Hey, hey, come on in the kitchen!" Well, the basement*

### Background of the Church Planting

In early November of 2012, Pastor Agulan met with Dr. Iparraguirre to discuss beginning a Family Church in Elizabeth. Before there was ever a direction to do so, Pastor Agulan had it in his heart to create a church close to the residences of members so that many more could join in the worship and so that it would be easier to bring their spiritual children to worship together and to share in the Unificationist way of life.

After that discussion, Pastor Agulan immediately reached out to community members and an initial organizing meeting was held. Elizabeth is a rich cultural mix and is home to families from Brazil, Africa, South America, Japan, and the Philippines. The first meeting had the spirit of a homecoming and a dream coming true, since many Unificationists from different cultures had not even met each other before, although they were neighbors. There was a sense of great relief and joy to be able to get together and get to know each other, to worship one God through the understanding of Divine Principle and the central role and message of our True Parents to love each other – in short to create the Kingdom of Heaven on Earth.

Everyone thought creating a family church together was a good idea, but how to do it? Many ideas were discussed – where would we hold the service, who should come, who would be the pastor and what language should the services be in? Even in that meeting, brothers and sisters translated for each other from French, Portuguese and Spanish and everyone participated 100 percent in the conversation. Everyone agreed that services should be given in English in spite of various home languages since all of the children of immigrant families speak English and would rather communicate in English.



*Attendance at Sunday Service has grown every week*

The Unification Church members in Elizabeth had a get-together party to kick off the 2013 New Year . The gathering was held at the Peterstown Community Center, and more than 30 families from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds joined to get to know each other, discuss the possibility of starting a local Unificationist congregation, share different dishes and just have a good time. There were 125 members present and three guests, Councilman Manuel Grova, Dr. Lizzie Alston of the Universal Church of God in Roselle and Rev. Jean Destine, pastor of the Missionary Church of God and Christ in Elizabeth.



*Darryl Franklin, on guitar, leads the Full Moon Flash Band at the worship services*

The Full Moon Flash Band, led by Darryl Franklin, opened the gathering with electrifying praise and worship songs. Dr. Iparraguirre gave a wonderful message on empowering and supporting the local communities. When she asked all in attendance if they were committed to create a local congregation, the answer was a resounding “Yes!” Six people representing the various cultural groups and various ages gave personal responses to the message. Mrs. Elece McKnight, Mr E.J. Rapada and Mrs. Elena Bahian shared the role of emcee during the entertainment, games and dance session. Finally Mrs. Huguette Lutondo led a beautiful song, entitled “Peace is not a Word, it’s a Way of Life,” and everybody held hands while singing it. Rev. Greg Agulan led the three cheers of *Eok Mansei*.



*The Children's Sunday School performs*

Families in Elizabeth held their first Sunday Service on Feb. 24, 2013. Attendance at Sunday Service has grown in each of the first four weeks Sunday service was held, from 50 to 62 to 81 to 93! The Elizabeth Music Ministry, headed by Darryl Franklin has grown in each of the four weeks he has been leading it. The first week, Darryl led the congregation solo. In the second week, emcee Christine Rapada and pianist Josette Mendoca joined Franklin on stage. In the third week E.J. Rapada provided words on the screen for all to see as they sang and recently, Christine and Sungniwan Mukanda joined the worship band to create a beautiful spirit to welcome the word of God. The organizing Ministry Committee members are all volunteers, each filling a pivotal role in building the church.