

Why Clergy Conferences Matter: An Interview with Rev. Joshua Cotter

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Rev. Joshua Cotter says, "we are very clear from the very beginning [of the OSDP conferences] that True Parents are the messiah, the Returning Lord."

The American Clergy Leadership Conference (ACLC) has been hard at work for four months educating 3,000 ministers and their core congregants at theology conferences in South Korea, Las Vegas and Atlantic City. Yet, some may ask how the new spate of conferences is different from those held for religious leaders in previous years. Rev. Joshua Cotter, vice president of the Unification Church in the United States, tells Familyfed.org about the miraculous achievement of the new, four-day seminars titled Original Substance of the Divine Principle (OSDP) conferences. Rev. Cotter says he attended the last five OSDP conferences and looks forward to the sixth and final conference of the year to take place in Chicago, December 14-17, 2011.

“This current round of OSDP workshops is based on the 172 clergy that Father Moon brought to Korea in September and their relationship with Father,” said Rev. Cotter. “They returned from Korea with Father’s direction to find and raise 12 pastors to become their spiritual children and to have them attend an OSDP conference. The Registration for God’s Kingdom and the Fatherland event in Las Vegas, on October 5, 2011, was kind of the kickoff for the OSDPs.”

“The reason that these OSDP conferences have been done is because of Father’s direction to educate 3,000 clergy. Father’s words during *hoon dok hwe* in Las Vegas were to do this right away. We pledged before Father with our lives that we would accomplish educating 3,000. So, the next day we brought 1,200 people from around America to be with True Parents and to set this condition. We held the Registration event centered on the 172 in Las Vegas and there, we made a 40-day condition of prayer and action, asking all our members and clergy in these 40 days to help with the education of 3,000 clergy. Since then, we have had three OSDP workshops in Atlantic City and two in Las Vegas.

“On November 22, 2011, Father extended the condition to educate 3,000 clergy to the end of the year. He also allowed us to teach the content of the Divine Principle in English, rather than Korean with an English translation. He then asked us to educate 12,000 people for the next year.

“So far, we’ve educated about 2,200 people. After the final OSDP workshop in Chicago, we have to report to Father and then determine how we will educate the next several thousand.”



Ministers at the Original Substance of the Divine Principle join hands to represent the unity of different denominations.

Developments of the OSDP Conferences

“The difference between these OSDP conferences from those done in the past is that these are based on the [support of the] 172 clergy. Father asked them to come to Korea and [he] invested in them, educated them, had one-on-one time with them, and it really did change their lives. Some of the 172 have been working with us for a long time, but only recently did they get that Father is the messiah. What Hyung Jin Nim, Kook Jin Nim and In Jin Nim have been declaring has created the environment for these pastors to clearly understand who True Parents are. Many of them came back with fire in their guts. They’ve been given a mission directly by the messiah. The women leaders especially have been on fire. Many of these women pastors came back feeling that Father is their father, and that’s a beautiful thing to see. Some of them brought not only 12 but 20 or 30 or 40 fellow pastors, church members and church leaders to the OSDP conferences and that’s what’s made the difference. These ministers consider themselves children and disciples of True Parents.

“In the OSDP workshop itself, we are very clear from the very beginning that True Parents are the messiah, the Returning Lord, and we maintain that message throughout the entire conference. Even from the way we begin the conferences, by reading Father’s speeches, we’re making it clear that True Parents are the messiah.

“The content has not substantially changed. The name was changed to OSDP to describe it more accurately. The lectures still go throughout the day from 6 a.m. to the evening. On the first night, we show a video about the testimonies of the 172 clergy. The conference is focused on their experience and lifting them up as leaders under True Parents. The second night, we focus on the Blessing. We go through the entire Blessing ceremony, with testimonies and holy wine, and explain that this is what we want them to do in their churches.

“In terms of what to do after the conference, we give the clergy three, clear action steps. First, we expect that they will bring 12 more people the next conference. Second, because we recognize that it’s difficult to absorb the material of the OSDP in three days, we encourage all the pastors to attend what we call Pastors’ Forums. This is something we’ve been doing for a few years with ACLC (American Clergy Leadership Conference) where we gather and study the Bible and the Divine Principle in a small group setting. It will be very important that we set up these pastors’ forums for next year. Third, we ask them to go back and bless 12 couples in their churches. I think America needs to have a Blessing movement if we’re going to save it. The Blessing needs to become main stream. From what we’ve seen in these conferences, that is really possible. The pastors see testimonies of lives being changed through the Blessing.



Pastor T. L. Barrett, Bishop of the Church of God and Christ

“Pastor T.L. Barrett, Bishop of the Church of God and Christ, is one of the 172 ministers who traveled to Korea. On the second night of the OSDP workshops, the Blessing night, we show a video called “The Power of True Love.” It features Pastor Barrett’s testimony about the healing of his marriage. It’s humorous and beautiful, and you can see the fruit of what Father and Mother have done by bringing their couple together. In addition, it shows the testimony of his son, Tory Barrett, who testifies tearfully about the healing of his own marriage through True Parents. This testimony needs to get out.”



Students of Generation Peace Academy join Rev. Jesse Edwards (far left) on stage for a rousing musical offering.

The Power of Praise Music

“Another part of this conference that is new is the music. In Atlantic City, Rev. Jesse Edwards, Rev. Levi Daugherty and I were talking about how we needed worship music. We had hundreds of pastors coming together from different denominations and faiths, and we had our brothers and sisters, first- and second-generations.

“Jesse had some DVDs of contemporary Christian music, so we combined that with our live band and put the words on the screen, so all can sing along. The songs are familiar to most Christian pastors but were new to our brothers and sisters. They were good, rock, Christian songs like those from the band, Hillsong. So we developed that for the first conference, and it worked really well.

“Then we invited pastors to join on stage, and about 50 young adults from Generation Peace Academy (GPA) joined as our interfaith choir. The fact that we had 50 young, second-generation Unificationists totally on fire as part of the conference blew away the pastors. They don’t see young people in [their] churches that often. So the GPA students were on stage, singing with the clergy and the entire 500 or 600 people in the audience were having church. It was a very powerful worship experience by which many of our church members, first- and second generations, have been transformed.

“The effect of having the young people there with the clergy is a win-win situation. The young people get to study the Bible and see the clergy, see how these ministers are responding to True Parents and realizing True Parents are the

messiah. And the ministers are inspired by the young people in return. We've had testimonies from the clergy that they can't believe they see young people there at 6 a.m. and that these young men and women have heart and enthusiasm, that they help out and by the end of the night, they're still ready to go. The clergy are very impressed."



Generaiton Peace Academy activists Sung Duk Morales and Matthew Rogers, along with another second-generation Unificationist, absorb the content of the OSDP conference.

The Impact of Lovin' Life Ministries

"I can't emphasize enough the timing of this. None of this would have been possible in America without the foundation or unity our Senior Pastor In Jin Nim has created. I talk about Lovin' Life and about how In Jin Nim wants to share her ministry with other churches. The clergy really get that. If we had not come together as a national team through In Jin Nim's guidance, with all the organizations and our churches working together, if we hadn't had this experience for the last three years of attending True Parents through Hyung Jin Nim and In Jin Nim's example, there's no way that this would be happening. Because of our training through Lovin' Life, we were able to respond immediately to Father's request for 172 ministers and the OSDP conferences. Father himself was grateful for that response and sent word back to America, thanking us. The response from the clergy was very heartening to Father and Mother.

"Also, ACLC is now being revived. Before, it was kind of limping along, if you will, with pastors and ministers not really seeing what our vision is. But with Father galvanizing and pulling things together, out of that group, disciples have emerged. Now it's not only the pushing from our members that gets the ministers to come to the OSDP workshops – they come on their own and even bring others with them. Of course, it's a shock for many to hear the Divine Principle for the first time because their world-view is under assault, but many are having spiritual experiences. People are being transformed. It's difficult to describe, but through the power of the spirit world, new things are happening. I'm sure that next year, once we've achieved educating 12,000 at the OSDP workshops, Father will want to expand the number to something like 144,000, but we're not worried about that. We have confidence that we can do it."