

My Testimony, How I Met the Unification Church on Easter Morning 1972

Joe Kinney
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The fruits of faith and effort, Mr. Kinney and his family

I was born in December 1950, the illegitimate child of a poor thirty-year-old Cherokee woman and the local mayor's brother, one of the richest men in a small Tennessee town near the city of Nashville. If discovered, this would have been a huge scandal, so they gave me up for adoption immediately. I was transferred to an orphan asylum in Memphis.

My birth mom was later married for thirty-two years with no children. I would finally meet her fifty years after my birth. At the age of eighty, she met her only child, four grandchildren and her daughter-in-law. I eventually met my Father's side relatives: I met brothers, sisters, aunts, uncles and cousins. My birth mom received and drank the Holy Wine.

From my birth mother I inherited my spiritual openness or "sixth sense." I grew up communicating with the spirit world, having out-of-body experiences and knowing about events before they happened.

I was adopted from the orphan asylum as an infant by the Kinney's, an Irish Catholic couple who married too late to have their own kids. They sent me to Catholic schools, where I attended Mass every school day. This intensive religious education combined with my Cherokee spirituality engendered in me a deep awareness of God.

Setting conditions

As a young boy I "made conditions" long before I heard that term from our church members. I prayed the rosary every day, and I promised to stop in the church and pray every time I passed by on my bicycle. I attended a Catholic Church camp one summer when I was in middle school and made the condition to thank God for everything constantly, even for the most trivial, mundane things like dust, fingernails, or air. I had the profound experience of God coming down in tears, moved by gratitude from one among the self-centered race of man.

Considering the priesthood

The priests and nuns in my Catholic school noticed that I was "different." A young priest, who was dying of cancer, took me under his wing and asked me to attend confession face-to-face in his room in the rectory (the priest's residence) every Thursday afternoon. This was a great honor for an elementary school boy. At this young age, I promised God that if Jesus returned in my lifetime, I would follow him at the sacrifice of everything. I knew it would happen before the end of my twenty-first year. I would join eighteen days before my twenty-second birthday.

I became an altar boy, which was a deep experience for me, especially serving mass for the nuns in the convent at 4:00 AM, which was so informal and the congregation so sincere. Between my freshman and sophomore years of college at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, I decided that I had to make a condition to ask God to guide me on whether to become a Catholic priest or not. My condition was to attend Mass every day for the summer term, about a hundred days. This led to the most incredible spiritual experience of my life.

The weekday masses took place in a side chapel with only ten to twenty congregants attending. At that time, church law allowed only an ordained priest to touch the Eucharist (bread, representing the body of Christ) and distribute communion. The time for communion arrived and the chapel filled with a brilliant spiritual divine light that stunned and overwhelmed all present. It was the most brilliant light I have ever seen, blinding, not to the eyes but to the soul. Under the influence of this miraculous heavenly

manifestation, the priest said, "Joe would you please distribute communion?" This violated church law and practice and was unprecedented. He then handed me the ciborium, which contained the Eucharistic bread, or hosts. A nun tried to raise her voice to protest but was unable to speak. I distributed communion to the dozen or so attending. When I returned the ciborium to the priest, the divine light was gone. So I had the answer from heaven: I was a priest for just a moment, but my destiny was beyond that.



Joe Kinney fixes the lawnmower so True Father can continue cutting the grass at Belvedere, May 1973

Lecture negotiations

For the next two and a half years, I searched. I researched all kinds of religions, read books, attended meetings, prayed and asked God for guidance.

I met my spiritual mother, Diane Frink Drucker, on Easter Sunday morning 1972. For several months she repeatedly tried to get me to listen to Divine Principle. I gave her money and helped her with laundry and transportation, but Diane just would not give up pushing me to hear the lectures. Finally I said that if she would go out on a date with me, I would listen to the lectures. Diane went out with me, but no good night kiss! As we stood at her door, she threw up her hands to block my advance and said, "OK, now you have to attend lectures!"

My state's first member

I was then attending my senior year at Christian Brothers College in Memphis and working almost full time. I rode my bike to lectures a couple days a week, and on Sunday, November 28, I said Pledge for the first time and committed my life to True Parents.

About a week later, Diane told me that she would be away for about a month. Later I understood that she wanted to visit her family and then had to attend God's Day with True Parents, then on January 1. I told Diane that I would not move into an empty rented house, but I promised to move in the day she returned.

Spiritually that month was very difficult with so many temptations that would have ended my relationship to True Parents. Diane returned and I moved in to the Tennessee center, the first member to join in Tennessee.

Opposition

The greatest test was yet to come: In mid-March 1973, the direction came that every state should send one member to the first One Hundred Day International Training Session; from Tennessee, that was me. I felt a terrible dark force trying to block me from going to Belvedere.

My Father told me that he was having surgery for colon cancer, and then he had a heart attack two days before the surgery was scheduled. The prognosis was dire; my father was not expected to live. My mother begged me in tears not to go; the tension was hell.

I said goodbye to my parents in the intensive care unit (ICU) with my Father unconscious and expected to die and my mother screaming in rage. The scratches on my face from my mother's fingernails took weeks

to heal. I was on my way to Belvedere and the rest is history.

My father survived and lived eleven more years. I think he would have died if I had stayed. When my dad did pass away in 1983, I experienced another miracle.



Joe Kinney and his friend Soon Ae Hong, Dae-mo nim, who he attended at East Garden

A farewell blessing

His doctor explained to us my Dad's steps to death. In the final step, he would be in a coma. My dad had been in this terminal stage coma for twelve hours with death hours away. My wife and I were leaving for the evening. We had told my mom that we would return in the morning. At that point, my dad moved mechanically like a body in a horror movie. He sat up in bed, bending mechanically at the waist, and then his head turned to us as if he were a robot and he said, "Goodnight Joe and Kumiko, and may God bless you both." Then he mechanically returned to lying flat. He never spoke or moved again. His last words were May God bless you both! From the man who should have died eleven years earlier.

My adopted mom, who had cursed me and scratched my face, lived with my family in our home in New Jersey, where she was surrounded by her grandchildren for the last four years of her life, passing away at the age of ninety-two.

Even though joining our church meant that I had to go through things that seemed impossible or cruel, by faith and taking responsibility, we found happiness.