

God's Hope for America Pilgrimage

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Alexa Ward and Kimiyo Anceney on the God's Hope for America Pilgrimage

I had the privilege of participating in the God's Hope for America Holy Ground Pilgrimage during its first full week, June 22–29, from San Francisco, California, to Dallas, Texas. I would like to share an experience I had in prayer during this time. As context for my testimony, I will begin with a number of valuable insights from Dr. Ki Hoon Kim, regional president for North America, who joined the pilgrimage for four days, from San Francisco, California, to Las Vegas, Nevada, and from Dr. Michael Balcomb, president, FFWPU in the United States, who was on the bus for the entire trip. Dr. Kim rejoined the tour midway, in Washington DC, as well as for the final week.

Dr. Kim shared many deep insights with us, while he was on the pilgrimage, as well as during the weeks that followed, providing valuable context for our own experiences. He shared how True Father pushed himself in 1965 as he traveled the country in forty-three days to establish the holy grounds. No one on

the trip brought any luggage, or any extra clothes. Some members purchased what clothes they needed along the way.

Dr. Kim also reminded us of the weather conditions at that time. Using the states of California and North Dakota as examples, he said, "The two extremes in weather are like heaven and earth, as different as day and night -- one deadly hot, the other bitterly cold. That was True Father's course for forty-three days."

"When we study True Parents' course, we find it is always a story filled with life-or-death situations. True Father risked his life for God's sake. This was True Parents' life. Nobody expected it when, on February 12, 1965, True Father landed at San Francisco International Airport, filled a small station wagon with five to seven people, and drove the entire expanse of America, eating breakfast, lunch and dinner in the car the whole way, and sometimes even sleeping in the car."

Dr. Kim explained that True Father initially planned to bless members during that visit in 1965; however, the foundation was not yet ready. He wanted to leave America with his blessing, so he decided to bless the land in all forty-eight states. We learned that by making these holy grounds, True Father created sacred ground that spiritually was connected to the time before the Fall.

Following his meeting with True Mother in Korea, early in July, Dr. Kim emphasized that, through this pilgrimage, we can inherit True Parents' providence and heart for the sake of this country; and we can recommit, centering on True Mother, for the sake of America.

During the months leading up to this pilgrimage, Dr. Michael Balcomb received deep insights from God, our Heavenly Parent as well as directions from True Mother, concerning our American members. God shared with him on a number of occasions that He was not going to send new members unless we took good care of the ones he had already sent. At about the same time, True Mother personally asked Dr. Balcomb to take responsibility to reach out to those members who had grown distant from or who had left the church.

After prayer and careful consideration, Dr. Balcomb launched the Remember Project. As a first step, a team of young men and women is now scanning more than twelve thousand original membership forms, in an effort to identify and reach out to these precious brothers and sisters. Through this pilgrimage, we are trying to set the condition to reconnect with those who joined over the past forty years, as well as bring new members to our church.

As the pilgrimage progresses, Dr. Balcomb has also connected to the heart of God, our Heavenly Parent, toward the holy grounds. He has come to feel repentant that we have not taken these holy grounds seriously enough over the past forty-nine years, and he is asking American members to join him in

changing our attitude in this area. In Dr. Balcomb's words, "I feel the urgency of the Lord. Let's clean up the past and move forward with a whole new spirit."



Pilgrims at the Twin Peaks Holy Ground in San Francisco, where the tour of fifty-five sites began

My Testimony

As the bus settled into its long journey, two seats were prepared for True Parents toward the front. I was sitting near those seats with my dear sister, Laura Hornbeck. From that day, we could feel the presence of our True Parents on the bus.

During the first week, we visited a total of eight holy grounds. On Tuesday, June 24, we visited two holy grounds, first at Mount Whitney, the highest peak in the continental United States, at nine thousand feet above sea level; and then at Death Valley, approximately two hundred feet below sea level, both of which are in California. The drive from Mount Whitney to Death Valley was very challenging, marked by hours on a narrow highway that wound its way through arid land, with many sharp turns and steep inclines.

It was on that stretch that I first began to think about and connect to True Father's trip in 1965. They piled into that station wagon and simply took off across the country. They did not spend weeks or months preparing for the trip, researching possible sites for the holy grounds, and making reservations for the many nights on the road. True Father went on faith, with the heart to see America through God's eyes, with a plan, and with the will and determination to see it through. He was gracious and generous toward those who embarked on that trip with him.

I also reflected on the many times, over the past forty years, that True Father and True Mother traversed this country from coast to coast, together as well as separately, sharing God's love and bringing God's word to the American people. At the first holy ground, at Twin Peaks in San Francisco, we heard excerpts from a prayer True Father gave at that very site, at 11 pm, on May 24, 1993. He had just completed the first twelve cities in a thirty-three-city speaking tour. On that night, holding her hand, he turned the tour over to True Mother. She continued on to the remaining twenty-one cities, while he went on to Kodiak, Alaska.

It was at the holy ground on Mount Whitney that I had my first tearful prayer on the trip. My tears flowed easily, tears for True Father, tears for True Parents' course in America. That tearful prayer deepened with each holy ground we visited. By the time we arrived in Albuquerque, I could feel the tears well up even as we approached the holy ground.

True Father appointed me to the position of president of WFWP-USA, on June 1, 1999. He invited my husband and me to East Garden to meet him on June 3. That was my first meal in the breakfast room at East Garden, with the pool and fish that True Father loved so much. Following Hoon Dok Hae and breakfast, True Father turned to me and asked me a number of questions. "How often do you pray? Do you cry for me in your prayer? Do you yearn for me in your prayer?" I answered each question honestly. Prayer was not my strong point. At that time, I did not cry in my prayer often, and I did not yearn for True Father in my prayers. True Father sat back for a moment and then said to me softly, "You have no foundation to be a leader in our movement.

A leader has to move the spiritual world by crying and yearning for me in prayer. You should serve with a mother's heart and not say anything." On that day, I was not ready to receive True Father's valuable internal guidance so deeply. I did realize that fulfilling these points would probably be more difficult than running WFWP. I also felt, however, that True Father understood my nature, my strengths and my weaknesses, and accepted me as I was.

On this special pilgrimage, fifteen years later, that part of my heart that could cry for True Father and yearn for True Father began to open, and open wide. I realized that following his ascension, I pushed

myself to move on, as had so many of my brothers and sisters. The slogan for this tour is "Remember, Revive, Reimagine." Genuine revival has to come from a place deep inside. It is not something you can will to happen. The presence of our True Parents on the bus and the pure spiritual atmosphere at these holy grounds is making it possible for us to have these deep experiences.

When your heart opens like this, the feeling of repentance follows naturally. Genuine revival comes through repentance, through tears, and through gratitude. Genuine revival also includes preparing to move forward. On this path of revival, I believe that God, our Heavenly Parent, wants to give each one of us what we need to move forward at this time.

During the victory celebration at the Palace, the day after Foundation Day, in February of 2013, at the close of her remarks, True Mother said to us softly, "Please make this worth it for me." My heart opened to her on a whole new level on that day. On this extraordinary pilgrimage, I believe that my Heavenly Parent gave me these experiences of True Father in prayer so that I can better support True Mother at this time.