

A New Model for How We Gather in Our Local Faith Communities

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American Unificationist faith communities need to adopt a new model for worship. This will solve three major headaches currently facing our American movement: lack of numerical growth, aging local congregations and the absence of a compelling and persuasive national vision.

Robin Debacker's recent article, *The Present and Future of our*

Unificationist Sunday Service, provides a clear indication it is time for us to earnestly consider creating a new style and kind of worship program. I also believe the 1996 inauguration of the Family Federation for World Peace and Unification (FFWPU) in Washington, DC, marked the beginning point for the American movement to create and adopt a different model and style of worship.

A proposed new model

Under the old Sunday service model, we understood we were meeting to “hear the word of God” delivered through our local pastor (or someone else who volunteered to deliver a message). Through hearing the word, we would be edified and encouraged to better ourselves in all areas of our lives. Under the new model I’m proposing, the worship service style we’ve been using for the past 25 years will stop. Instead, we would start meeting as a faith community once every five weeks (maybe shorter or longer). When we do come together, we will do so with a different orientation and purpose for why we’re gathering.



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This proposed new model calls for us to gather together and experience the presence of God as Blessed Central Families, without the burden of inherited sin and where all people can be “reborn” by receiving the Blessing from True Parents. Such a gathering will be, in effect, a recognition ritual where we share in how God’s love is revealed and experienced within the context of “Blessed Family Life.” Children will be recognized. Husbands and wives will be honored. Parents will be praised. Friends and neighbors will be invited to participate in this joyous gathering and they will want to return again and again to get more of the same.

Utilizing available speeches, textbooks, audio and video materials, the Internet, and existing programs in our varied Unification organizations, Unification families will tap into these resources and use them to edify and educate themselves and their neighbors. The small groups/home church/tribal messiahship activities are the ideal settings to deliver such education and moral uplift. The transformation of lives and maturation of the “four levels of love” (child, brother/sister, husband/wife, parents) will occur most strikingly during the four-week period we are engaged in before we gather together again to honor, recognize and celebrate.

We could call upon our talented architects to come up with a creative design and construct a “Unification House of Joy” building. This building would have a distinct design, feeling and quality specifically crafted to allow such gatherings to take place. The building will also allow for a multitude of programs and activities to be run, programs that are helping to solve real problems in people’s lives. In the cities large enough where such a building makes sense, our national headquarters would do its part to support the construction of such buildings. These buildings will represent part of the “Unification brand presence” here in America.

Why we need to move in this direction

Since the mid-1990s, development of worship service in America has resulted in our weekly Sunday gatherings looking like a peculiar mixture of current Catholic and Protestant services, sprinkled with a

few Unificationist cultural norms. Although we've had Unification Theological Seminary for nearly forty years, during that period we did not — as an intentional strategy — send graduates out to existing faith communities charged specifically with “being a preacher and peaching the Word of God.”

For decades we've used a model of worship that required someone to deliver a sermon to those gathered, without focusing on the ministerial aspect of what it means to “be a preacher and to preach the Word of God” or on “what is supposed to be happening to the people who are gathered listening to the sermon.” Valiant efforts have been made over the years to provide good sermons, but as Robin's research seems to indicate, the results overall have been less than satisfactory.

The primary reason why there is discontent and disappointment with our Sunday worship program is because we have been using the external format of a modern-day evangelical church while trying to deliver Unification theology and doctrine. The format used and content delivered don't match up. We have been behaving like Christians on Sunday morning (via the choice of our worship format) but at the same time preaching a different “gospel.” This behavior has resulted in our suffering an identity crisis. Unification theology and doctrine include *and* transcend the Old and New Testament. We are Christian...and then some!

In Protestant Christianity, the primary task has always been preaching and teaching the Word of God from the Bible. The Book of Acts and the Epistles demonstrate the primacy of preaching and teaching the Word. Revivals centered on great preaching have always ushered in great movements in the history of the Church. The Scriptures and Church history clearly demonstrate the importance of preaching and teaching the Word. The “act of preaching” coupled with the biblical message of the whole Gospel was expected to manifest the Holy Spirit upon the congregation, bringing about life-transforming changes in the sinner, and awakening him or her to the need for repentance and regeneration through Jesus Christ.

Our Founder, Reverend Sun Myung Moon, himself was powerfully influenced by this kind and type of preaching in Korea during his teenage years. Accounts by his early disciples show that when Father began his public ministry in Korea, he used preaching as the primary way to influence his followers.

When Father moved to America, he continued using preaching as the main way to influence the American members. Between the years 1977-94 alone, Father delivered over 700 sermons to the members on Sunday mornings (at 6:00 am!) from the stage of the former Belvedere International Training Center in Tarrytown, New York. Our American church does have a long history of listening to sermons and we have been holding Sunday services for a long time. It's a tried and true model in American Christianity and throughout the world. However, with the providential inauguration of the FFWPU, I believe True Parents opened up a new and different way that people can “be with God.”



The “*new* good news” ushered in with the inauguration of FFWPU is we are now in the providential age where families, not individuals, can receive a salvation that transcends any particular religion's progress or success. In other words, the mission of religion as we have known it up until now has come to end. The new paradigm of salvation is through marriage between husband and wife and the maturation of true love via family life.

Naturally, we no longer need preachers charged with being the impetus for the Holy Spirit to manifest upon the congregation during a service to bring about life-transforming changes in the individual sinner. If any preaching needs to be done, it is through the Blessed Couples. The authority of a Blessed Couple rests on how they apply in their daily lives the cultural norms and values embedded within Blessed

Family Life. Blessed Family Life is the “Holy Spirit coming down and resting in the hearts and minds of the husband and wife and parents and children.”

This is why we no longer need to be using anointed individual pastors and the Christian church Sunday service format for gathering together. We no longer need to behave like this in order to secure our salvation. This has all been made possible through the emergence of the era of FFWPU, an era that ushered in the unfolding grace of God’s love, transcending any particular religion’s success or progress.

The proposed format for gathering together I’m calling for is a way out of our current identity crisis and will provide the way for our friends and neighbors to join in with us so they too can “be saved.”

To gain the necessary momentum that will allow us to move forward with this proposal we will need to create an “issues group” dedicated to moving this discussion forward and eventually before our FFWPU National Council.

Quickly implementing this new model will allow our American Unification movement to escape from the oft-debilitating stagnation, status quo thinking and faltering hope. This new model could be the solution to resolve the three major headaches of our current American movement I noted earlier. Perhaps it is an idea whose time has come.

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