

## ACLC Valentine's Day Marriage Blessing in Ossining, NY

Bruce Grodner  
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On Valentine's Day 2016, twenty-three couples from the *Iglesia Trinidad de Dios* (Holy Trinity Church) in Ossining, New York, received the Holy Marriage Blessing. Their senior pastor, Rev. Otoniel Jimenez, and his wife, First Lady Margarita Jimenez, whose own marriage had been blessed in 1997, officiated the afternoon ceremony. Although First Lady Jimenez was recovering from foot surgery and her leg was bound in a cast, she was present to support the ceremony.

Earlier that morning, Bishop Jesse Edwards, national evangelist of the American Clergy Leadership Conference (ACLC), delivered the sermon at the Holy Trinity Church during its Sunday Service. He gave a spirit-filled message, which included his own testimony of experiencing God's love when he and his wife, Rev. Tanya Edwards, received the Marriage Blessing.

For most members of the congregation, Spanish is their first language, so Rev. Jimenez's son, Minister Darwin Jimenez, translated the sermon. Realizing the value of the Marriage Blessing, many members of the congregation returned with their spouse for the 4 p.m. seminar and ceremony.

The afternoon festivities began with Minister Darwin Jimenez welcoming everyone to the church. Rev. Bruce Grodner, ACLC national outreach director, gave a presentation about God's ideal for marriage, with special attention to the Three Great Blessings that God wants to bequeath to humankind. Rev. John Arias, pastor of the Spanish Family Church in Manhattan, translated the presentation into Spanish while conveying the main message about God's love for His children.

Bishop Jesse Edwards followed with a spirited presentation on what went wrong, explaining how all humankind needs to be engrafted back into the blood lineage of God. During a short break the couples freshened up and the brides changed into formal clothing, with some even putting on wedding gowns. A spirit of joyful expectation filled the church.

The Blessing began with Bishop Jesse Edwards welcoming the twenty-three couples and sixty others in attendance. Arm in arm, husbands and wives walked down the aisle as gentle music played through the church's sophisticated sound system.

A joyful and electric feeling spread through the congregation. Couples who had come only to observe the ceremony were moved by the spirit to participate in the Marriage Blessing themselves. The video "The Power of True Love" was shown as a testament to the value of the Marriage Blessing, with Rev. Arias translating it into Spanish.

In preparation for the ceremony, Minister Darwin Jimenez led the congregation in a praise song, which opened everyone's heart. Rev. and First Lady Jimenez gathered all the couples at the altar and sprinkled

Holy Water on each person. They then gave Holy Wine to each wife. The husbands and wives bowed to each other, and each drank a portion of the Holy Wine. The wives drank first, then the husbands, and then the couple passed the cup to their children to drink. Rev. Jimenez emphasized that all these couples are now one. Deep emotion spread through the church, and even tears were shed.

The Exchange of Rings was joyful and heartfelt, followed by the Reading of the Vows. The couples responded with a strong “amen” after each vow was read. Rev. Jimenez gave the concluding prayer to seal these twenty-three couples as eternal husbands and wives. Then he invited everyone to a wonderful celebratory banquet in the gaily decorated dining hall downstairs.



Rev. Jimenez had been preparing the couples for the Marriage Blessing for several months, and one wife said, “My daughter just had surgery and I really wanted to go to the Blessing, but if she had been in pain we would not have been able to go. I prayed every day for her to be pain-free. The morning of the Blessing our daughter felt no pain—and our family was able to attend the entire program.”

Vianna Rivers-Martinez said, “I wouldn’t have missed this for anything. I went out to buy a new wedding dress. I feel this Marriage Blessing is worthy of all my devoted preparation.”

Solvann Gonzalez said, “This was the best experience of my life. I got married again.”

Luke Higuchi, who photographed the entire event, said, “This Marriage Blessing is really God’s hope for America. I feel so much hope myself when Christian pastors take responsibility to bless their congregations. The ceremony today should have been videotaped and shown across the country.”

Mrs. Helen Alexander commented, “I was surprised by the change that came over the church during the Marriage Blessing. At the beginning some of the husbands were reluctant to be involved, but during the ceremony such a joyful spirit prevailed that all joyfully participated.”

Rev. Jimenez said, “I spoke to everyone. They had such a wonderful experience and everyone learned so much. I want to do this again next year, but I feel my church building is not going to be big enough. We will have to rent a larger facility.”

Special appreciation goes out to Mrs. Helen Alexander and Mrs. Julia Okamoto from the WestRock, New York, community for taking care of Rev. and First Lady Jimenez through the years, and to Rev. Bruce Grodner, Mrs. Debbie Grodner, and Mrs. Myung Hwa Reiner, who helped invite neighbors to the program and prepared the sanctuary for the Marriage Blessing.