

## Elizabeth NJ Family Church organizes first Marriage Blessing Ceremony of 2017

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After attending “We Can Do It” Tribal Messiahship workshops in August and November of last year, more than 20 families from the Elizabeth Family Church of New Jersey were inspired to organize their first Marriage Blessing Ceremony of 2017.

The ceremony was held on Saturday, January 21, at St. Elizabeth’s Episcopal Church.

The ceremony was attended by three couples—of Filipino, Indian and Nepalese descent—who were very emotional during the Blessing ceremony officiated by Emiljun and Christine Rapada, representing True Parents. Prior to the ceremony, Rev. Jose Rafael Sanchez explained the significance of the Marriage Blessing to the participants.



Rev. Manoj Jacob, the district pastor of District 3, gave the Blessing address, while Elizabeth Family



Church Pastor Darryl Franklin delivered the invocation. Around 80 people attended the event, including local pastors and community leaders within District 3 (New Jersey, Pennsylvania and Delaware). Everyone was very inspired and thankful for a successful program despite some last-minute changes.

The days leading up to the Blessing ceremony were truly a battle because of many challenges and setbacks that took place even hours before the event. Sincere and desperate prayers were offered, and one member of the Elizabeth Family Church even offered a three-day fast to muster spiritual support for this second stage of Blessing ceremonies since the community decided to take this path to fulfill Vision 2020.

Originally, eight couples had agreed to receive the Blessing, but then that number was reduced to three, and on the day prior to the event even their attendance was unsure. Some people suggested that the ceremony be postponed or even canceled. There was so much anxiety and reluctance even a few hours before the ceremony, especially when changes had to be made to the program because of unexpected turns of events.



An hour before the event, the guests finally showed up and learned more about the Blessing while the main room was being prepared. Assistant Pastor Rapada commented, “It felt like an uphill battle that required deep faith in God and unity among the organizers.... [After the guests arrived], suddenly, the room began to radiate beams of hope, abundant blessing and hearts of joy. Everyone felt the loving hands of our Heavenly Parent and great spiritual support from good ancestors.”

The ceremony proceeded solemnly through the guidance of the emcee, Rev. Elena Bahian, the spiritual mother of one of the couples. Rev. Shota Iwasaki, the state pastor of FFWPU for Pennsylvania, gave the congratulatory message, and Mr. Atsushi Takino, the District 3 representative to the National Council, led the cheers of *Eog Mansei* (victory).

While a buffet dinner was served, the Elizabeth Family Church choir entertained the Blessing participants, guests and family members. Bong and Jaye Alvarez sang a beautiful song entitled “From This Moment On” in honor of all blessed families, especially the newly blessed couples.



*Thank you for this beautiful ceremony. My heart is filled with happiness.*  
–Niina Shahani, Blessing participant from Newark, New Jersey

*This is unexpected. I truly feel blessed. It was very heart-warming and emotional at the same time.*  
—Pilar Calubiran, Blessing participant from Queens, New York

*It's an amazing event. Thank you for having us.*  
—Hans Moyer, community leader of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

What is more amazing was that one of the Blessing participants from New York attended the Sunday celebration in our community and committed to visit as often as possible, even if she lives so far away, because she felt the warmth and heart of our blessed families.

*We of the Elizabeth Family Church offer this victory to our Heavenly Parent and our beloved True Parents.*