

Incredulous New York Gets a New Look from the God Bless America Campaign

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On Monday, May 3, the "America the Beautiful" project of the God Bless America Festival was officially inaugurated as over 1,000 members took up their brooms and dustpans to clean Manhattan and the Bronx. Dressed in white jumpsuits with the God Bless America Festival logo silkscreened in red and blue on the back, members cleaned by three's in their witnessing areas from 7 to 8 a.m. From the beginning, a new spirit rushed through the Yankee Stadium campaign as members embarked on one of the most significant and well-received Church projects.

Col. Pak expressed Rev. Moon's goals for the clean-up campaign after a Sunday speech at the Headquarters building on May 2. "Ever since he came to New York, Rev. Moon's heart was broken because the beautiful city of New York was so dirty. He determined: 'One day, the Unification Church will clean up New York.' The time has come to respond and bring a glorious result. The people will be so puzzled! They will have an awful time trying to find a word to describe it. Rev. Moon asked me to encourage you, telling you how important this campaign is. This is one of the most important things which is happening in 1976 -- a physical and internal clean-up.

"Let's let this campaign be a silent testimony of what we are doing for this nation and the world," continued Col. Pak. "Let's live up to Rev. Moon's desire to bring physical and spiritual resurrection. The America the Beautiful program is showing by dramatic example that we are really going to restore New York and all cities of America. Rev. Moon would like to ask you to apply yourselves diligently to this project to bring physical victory."

The campaign was publicly opened by a kick-off ceremony in the South Bronx at noon on May 3rd. Michael Warder opened the rally, which was attended by 100 members ready for cleaning, curious neighbors, the press, and two representatives from the city government. As President Salonen addressed the group a sanitation truck driver shouted a cheer.

Mr. Salonen said: "This country prospered because people were willing to work with their hands to make their dreams come true and to make their hopes into a reality. But we see that for too many of our brothers and sisters, that hope has become dim and that dream a far too distant reality. We want to do something to rebuild the hope of America as we enter our third century, so that we can bring God's' Blessing to America. The America the Beautiful campaign is to show how we are going to clean up America physically by cleaning up all the trash and garbage on the streets. But we are doing it with a new spirit because we want to clean up spiritually and morally, as well. Let's be determined to create a new spirit of cleanliness and righteousness. Don't just work with your hands alone. Carry your hearts to the streets of New York."

Members leave for their cleaning areas every morning at 6:30, taking their breakfast with them to be eaten after cleaning. Using push-brooms, regular brooms and dustpans, cleaners bag the trash and leave it on the curb to be picked up by the city's Sanitation Department. Every day new streets are cleaned; since the campaign is done in cooperation with the Sanitation Department, the cleaning has to be done where the sanitation trucks will travel that day. nothing is neglected. The brooms pass over sidewalks, steps, curbs,

and gutters as they clean up papers, boxes, beer cans, bottles, countless cigarette butts, junk, and just plain dirt.



Public response to the campaigns from the first day has been overwhelming, injecting new vitality into witnessing activities. New York's middle and upper classes, previously unattracted by the Yankee Stadium campaign, watched the clean-up with surprise and support. "I couldn't have taken that many drugs last night!" said a shocked young man as a cleaning team was on its way to its area on the first day. "You deserve a commendation! More power to you. Do you have a broom to give me? Our salvation is coming! Someone cares about us" are but a few remarks heard by some members. It is not uncommon for passersby to have tears in their eyes.

New Yorkers respond to more than just the cleaning -- "You're the first people who have smiled at me in the morning since I have lived in New York." "I've been waiting years for something like this to happen" said the owner of a coffee shop in Greenwich Village, bringing out coffee and doughnuts to the team. Flyers explaining the project are easily distributed, and not just to pedestrians. A rich lady in a chauffeur driven limousine rolled down her push-button window to ask for literature. A bus driver stopped his bus, took the literature, and passed it out to his passengers. (There are many, many more stories.)

The campaign has been covered by all three major networks and several local TV stations. Typical network coverage included shots of members at the kick-off rally singing "America the Beautiful," close-ups of a member sweeping up dirt, an explanation of the campaign by a Church official, and comments -- invariably positive -- from local merchants. One commentator said, "The rank and file couldn't be more enthusiastic about it." She then interviewed New York member Pat Hammer: "I don't think that New York has ever seen anything like it," said Pat. "I know that we are going to be the best."