

Young Unificationists Organize Fundraiser for Their Faith Community

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Second-generation Unificationists in Boston raised \$1,600 for their local Lovin' Life Ministries (LLM) worship service by organizing a fundraiser titled "Coffee House for a Cause" at the church center on March 31, 2012. The event, which included an art gallery and refreshments, featured both Unificationist- and non-Unificationist bands, as well as an *open mic*, drawing about 150 people.



Eiko Tsukamoto (24), who is completing her masters in Higher Education at the Harvard Graduate School of Education, says the idea for the fundraiser came during LLM Sunday service in mid-February, 2012.

"Rev. Dmitry Vilchitsky, the Boston Lovin' Life Pastor, gave a presentation about raising \$24,000 to upgrade the music equipment at the Boston Church," she said. "He mentioned that the music equipment has not been upgraded for decades and that most of the equipment is significantly outdated. The idea of elevating the standard of worship and music ministry at the Boston Church really resonated with me, and I wanted to do something to help create an even more uplifting, encouraging, motivational worship experience that would emulate the quality of Lovin' Life Ministries in Manhattan.



Second-generation Unificationists Onai Carlson, Sancha Ogden and Kaeai Carlson attended the event.

Tsukamoto, a native of Los Angeles, added: "I am so grateful to the Boston community, especially after having moved here for school. Even though I didn't know anybody, they were so welcoming. I graduate soon, and I really wanted this event to be something I could offer back to them. I thought this would be a

good opportunity to bring together young people while contributing to a cause.”



Other young Unificationists who contributed their time and effort into the event included Youngshim Gontijto (22) and Hyun Moraes (20). Gontijto, who is studying illustration at Massachusetts College of Art and Design, organized the art gallery, and Moraes, a drummer studying at the Berkley College of Music, was in charge of inviting musicians to play at the event. According to Tsukamoto, core-staff helpers included Rev. Vilchitsky and second-generation Unificationists Sophie Maes and Tommy Noda, youth leaders of the Boston LLM community.

In addition to raising funds for a new sound system, this event was an opportunity to build community spirit and promote a welcoming culture within the church, according to Tsukamoto. “The event was open to the public, and we tried to create an atmosphere where anybody would feel comfortable,” she said.

Gontijto said that the gallery included the work of “12 artists from the local Boston area. That in itself was really crazy. I’ve never organized something this big before, but we had a very good turnout. We got to showcase a lot of people, some of whom got publicity for the first time. The music, art and food all complemented each other well, and people moved around very comfortably.



Amherst student Jean Eisenman and CARP (Collegiate Association for the Research of Principles) secretary Wendy Fiala performed at the open mic.

“We held this event to bring people together, and we were so surprised that people came from New Jersey, New York, Massachusetts, Rhode Island and even Chicago! It felt like a mini reunion. I got to see all of my friends who came from out of Boston to support us. We’ve never seen this many people here at once.”

Moraes, the drummer for Sail the Boat, a band that performs weekly at a LLM youth service called Junction in New York City said, “When we first had this idea of an *open mic*, we thought that we’d just have a couple of people play. Then I realized: ‘I go to school for music, and I’m surrounded by musicians 24/7. So why not bring other bands and musicians to the event and stop being so exclusively Unificationist?’

“What I learned is this: never put obstacles on what you think you can achieve. If we had been content with just an *open mic*, we would have had a nice, small event. But when you remove self-imposed obstacles, doors open up. You meet people; you see things happen. You’re going to find the right people at the right place at the right time.

“I didn’t think we could get five bands here, but eventually people called me back and told me they wanted to perform. I’m so happy everything came through.”

Gontijo credited much of the success of the Coffee House to “our core team and all of our volunteers, who put a lot of effort into reaching out to friends. We invited everybody we knew: church friends, school friends, and people from out of state. Then we started getting a positive response, and we all started getting excited about it, and started planning more thoroughly.”

Gontijo says her biggest takeaway lesson was realizing the value of planning ahead. “I’m glad we planned it so far ahead of time. We’ve been planning this for more than a month. In the past, we have done things pretty last minute, but I don’t see how we could have pulled off an event as successful as this if we had been rushing. We would have skipped over the details, and it wouldn’t have been as pleasant as it was.

“I’m also very grateful that so many people came and supported us. Our church has been in need of new equipment for years, and we just took a big step towards our goal.”

“I hope that this will be a jump start for future coffeehouses, both in Boston and around the nation,” said Tsukamoto.