

The 13th Blessed Culture and Sports Festival at UTS in Barrytown

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About 650 people gathered for the 13th annual Blessed Culture and Sports Festival (BCSF) at Unification Theological Seminary in Barrytown, New York from August 9 to August 13, 2017. People from all across America, and even from Canada, Japan and Germany gathered to camp together, play sports, and celebrate the culture of the Unificationist faith community.

The festival kicked off on Wednesday evening with opening remarks from Dr. Ki Hoon Kim, who told us how his heart feels right at home with all these young people, and encouraged everyone to feel True Mother's love through the activities. Toyomichi Hagiwara, this year's director, also welcomed the youth and young adults to the program.



The theme of this year's festival was "reunion" -- and the camaraderie was palpable in the air throughout the week. As always, a huge highlight of BCSF was the fierce but positive competition that all the communities brought to the field. Tournaments of soccer, Frisbee, volleyball, basketball, badminton were held, among others. There was also a 5k race, a Mudder's Trail, and for the first time ever, a game of S.K.A.T.E as well as a rock-climbing competition. In addition, "indoor sports" like poker, League of Legends, Ping-Pong, and a Harry Potter-themed escape room were heavily attended. There was also a fashion show, an open mic night, a film festival comprised of community members who submitted videos, Dance Mania, and even a Snapchat Geofilter Contest.



"We knew that it was going to be a great game every time we stepped onto the field," said Israel Marin, captain of the New York Frisbee team. "To be honest, the competition was so good! They didn't make it easy. But I'm very grateful that what we put out on the field was everything we had, and you can't ask for a better game than that."

The spiritual food was provided by daily Hoon Dok Hae and yoga sessions, as well as a Thursday evening service and a Sunday morning service. Richard Curry asked us to be intentional about how we spend our time, and Mika Deshotel reminded us that being there for people is often the most important thing we can do.

This year, in an effort to ensure that everyone younger than 18 years old felt supported and cared for, we instituted a structured daily check-in with their guardian. Participants were asked to share about their day, how they were feeling, and one reflection question. This gave families and people of different generations the opportunity to connect with each other.

On Saturday, Family Day was attended by 18 young families and their kids. Barbecue was served while kids played in a water-slide bouncy castle and other water activities, and had crafts and activities inside. The Korean Evangelical Association set up a foot-volleyball game, and a golf tournament was also held off-campus.

Another huge highlight of the event was the Village, a foods-and-crafts fair that lined the driveway of the UTS Campus. Seventeen artists, programs, and food vendors came to showcase and sell their products -- this also served as an opportunity for us to celebrate the arts and creativity of our community.

BCSF is a place that people can come to truly be themselves. It's the place that people can come to, no matter what they believe and what their life is outside of BCSF, and really enjoy the company of their community. We want BCSF to be a touchstone and a safe space, so that no matter what is going on in people's lives, BCSF will still be here every year.

"It was really amazing to be immersed in the culture that was inspired by True Parents," said Karlson Allen, the Director of General Affairs. "There were a lot of young Unificationists and non-Unificationists interacting in love. Seeing that kind of culture is always really beautiful to be a part of. After this week, I feel closer to God and closer to my brothers and sisters."

To view the highlights of BCSF and be plugged in for next year, visit bcsfusa.com, or find us on Facebook (www.facebook.com/BCSFUSA/).