

Witnessing to Spanish-Speaking North Americans

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The first Latin-American Blessing Ceremony

The Latino Ministry, which is an initiative that Dr. Ki Hoon Kim, regional president FFWPU North America; and Dr. Michael Balcomb, president of the FFWPU USA, inspired, began in 2013.

From its founding, Rev. Ricardo de Sena, its national director, has traveled the nation establishing chapters in the main cities where Hispanics are located.

Today, apart from its national center in New York City, the ministry has branches in the cities of Elizabeth and Clifton, New Jersey; Miami, Florida; Bridgeport, Connecticut; Chicago, Illinois; Cincinnati, Ohio and Los Angeles, California.



Since its inception, the ministry's vision has been to bring the message of God and True Parents to the 30 million Latin-Americans living in the United States. Keeping in mind that so many of those individuals and families would not easily have access to our movement solely through an English-language approach, the Latino ministry has held its activities in Spanish in an effort to make the Divine Principle and the blessing available to them.

Last year, as its education director, I led the ministry to conduct two-day seminars monthly and seven-day seminars quarterly. Hundreds of participants listened to the Divine Principle in a joint effort by brothers

and sisters witnessing around the nation.

In my opinion, as we were moving we could not understand where the urgency to witness and educate new members was coming from. Only after a year had passed did we understand that behind our resolution to witness was our True Father in heaven exerting effort to bring satisfaction to True Mother through our results.

What a joy it has been to be in the midst of such loving relationship! The highlight of the summer in New York City was the Twenty-One-Day National Seminar held from July 4–23. This was the first seminar of this length in the history the Unification Church in America conducted entirely in Spanish. During the first week, twenty-four participants heard the Divine Principle surrounded by the beauty of nature in Camp Sunrise in Upstate New York; that is, in New York State north of New York City.

During the second week, the participants jumped into a van and followed the buses of the God Bless America Pilgrimage Tour from Washington DC to New York City.

This was a profound experience for all the men and women attending the workshop. They spoke of how deeply touching it was to see brothers and sisters from around the country holding hands, singing and praying for the salvation of the nation.

Thanks to their experiences on the pilgrimage, they came to recognize the clarity of Father's vision for America, which also moved them.

In the third week, we invited older Hispanic brothers and sisters, pioneers of the Unification Church in America, to share their testimonies.

Everyone at the seminar site treasured the opportunity to hear Nancy Makowski, Antonio Betancourt, Luis Patiño, among others, share their experiences with our True Parents and to explain the history of our movement during the seventies and early eighties. Overall, the seminar was a great success and ended with the general desire to organize a second edition in the summer of 2015.



The year ahead

During the final quarter of last year, the ministry joined hands with other brothers and sisters in New York City and took God's message to the streets of Manhattan and Queens. With a revival spirit, they sang songs and preached excerpts of Father's "God Hope for America" speech while holding signs that read, *Familia, Paz, Unidad* (Family, Peace, Unification).

Spanish-speaking members exerted effort in all of these areas to convey to Latino families the role North America and South America play in establishing God's kingdom on earth.

In the same spirit, working to bring victory in their missions as tribal messiahs, the ministry conducted pre-blessing ceremonies for couples from the community. Using this painting of a married couple, dozens of smiling couples, recited the four vows and drank the holy wine while recommitting their marriage to God.

Reaping the fruits of that effort, last December 20, we held our first Blessing Ceremony for five couples. On the same occasion, the UPF named ten ambassadors for peace, all prominent members of the Hispanic community.

We hoped to instill a sense that Heaven had called the ambassadors for peace and newly blessed couples to work for the realization of world peace.

From the start of 2015, one the main foci of the Latino Ministry has been to implement in the United States the home group methods applied with great success in Brazil. So far, four groups have been formed and the benefits have been already felt: "The support and fellowship of my home group has helped my husband and I integrate deeper into the Unification Church community and work on some of the issues that were affecting our marriage. Now we are looking forward to inviting our relatives and friends to the meetings," said Julia Castellanos, one of the participants of the groups in New York City. According to Mrs. Monica Vallejo, the Latino Ministry home group director, the goal by the end of 2015 is to double the number of home groups.

Another focus of the ministry this year has been to improve the quality of our Sunday services. First, centered on a group of young members, the ministry is developing a band of musicians that will prepare a heavenly atmosphere before the sermon. Second, the pastor is giving a friendlier message to welcome newcomers. In addition, we are using audiovisual resources to convey, more efficiently and powerfully, God's message to the audience. All these, plus a commitment on the part of the members to create an environment conducive to fellowship has elevated the quality of the service to a new level.

Apart from what the Latino Ministry did so successfully last year, this year some of the programs included in its agenda are: Latin-American cultural programs every two months, English classes, street festivals in the summer months and outdoor witnessing activities. With the summer ahead, brothers and sisters of the Latino Ministry are looking forward to a year of great success toward the fulfillment of the Vision 2020.