

Why Sunday Morning Service Should Be Moved Into Our Homes

Raman Montanaro
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Raman Montanaro and his family

As the title suggests, this essay will argue the merits of moving our Unification Church Sunday service into our homes, that is, into the homes of the Blessed Central Families. The essay will examine arguments for and against it, and end with a proposal for church governance and liturgy which I believe will satisfy Heaven and help all of us to fulfill the heavenly mandate to bring the world to an understanding of, and relationship with, our Heavenly Parents and our True Parents.

First, allow me to sketch a brief outline of the idea itself: on Sunday morning, rather than all of us going to some central location in our respective regions and attending Sunday service, we should all stay home and conduct service in our home. We should invite friends and colleagues, family and co-workers – anyone who likes us enough to attend our church. I think any of our families could find 10 such people and families within a year. The format is open to each Blessed Couple’s sensibilities, although I think most couples would want to include song and prayer, reading and preaching. I call this “True Home Church.”

The second part of this new idea would include a **Family and Fellowship Day, to be held every Saturday**, which would allow our families and children time for re-birth and re-generation, as well as time for us to collectively develop and support our individual home-based Sunday service.

Why is this idea preferable to our current practice? Firstly, most people we meet would much rather come to our home than come to our church. If someone has already met the pastor (you!) and likes him or her, then it is quite natural to agree to come to their home church service. It is not threatening. It is actually interesting and attractive.

Secondly, as the spiritual parent and pastor, it is quite easy and natural for us to tailor the message to our audience, to give each guest exactly what he or she needs. We have debated for years the purpose of Sunday service, whether it should be “guest-friendly” or deep and heartistic, with open reference to True Parents and the Divine Principle. The former satisfies our need to witness, but leaves the members dry. The latter feeds the members, but shocks and often turns away our guests. True Home Church solves the first half of this dilemma: guests are given exactly what they need and are nurtured through their period of growth by loving spiritual parents, who are themselves simultaneously growing and being nurtured by **giving** to others. All of us have had the experience of meeting God most deeply when we are able to share the Divine Principle and our love of True Parents with a new guest or spiritual child. As people who have sat at the feet of our True Parents for so many years, what do we hope to receive in Sunday service that we have not already received 1000 times over from them? We have matured to the point where we cannot be filled by simply receiving: to be satisfied now, we must give back some of what we have received. True Home Church is the ideal venue for that giving.

This is one reason for discontent in our church. Members feel that though True Father trained them for years, they are not trusted to lead a church. Of course, there are not enough church leadership positions for every member to have one, and none of us is truly qualified, but that doesn’t change the fact that each of us feels like a medical student who has gone through 10 years of university and medical school and internship, only to be asked to stay in the classroom and continue to learn for the rest of our lives, never to be trusted to have our own practice, to have our own patients. Of course, none of us is expert or beyond reproach, but we must start. Reverend Won Pil Kim once told us that to become a great surgeon, one must first lose a few patients. We each need that opportunity. True Home Church is the only structure that fully allows and embraces that reality.

Thirdly, as mentioned above, conducting our own church service on Sunday morning is the best way to grow, both in numbers as a church, and more importantly perhaps, individually as God's children. We will see our spiritual reality plainly. If no one comes to our service, perhaps it is because we are not yet spiritually attractive. There is no one to blame then but myself, my own spiritual practice. If God does trust us enough to send us a guest, we must take care of them, bringing them to God and True Parents, even blessing them. This challenges us to do what we should have been doing all along: becoming True Parents' second self. This is what True Father did, in the early days in Korea. He invited all mankind to his home and took care of them.

Let us look at some of the potential arguments **against** this idea. First, many members will argue that they are not capable, not ready, not willing to open their homes as a church on Sunday morning. This is true. None of us is really ready, willing or capable. A pastor needs to perfect his or her emotion, intellect and will to be truly effective. Our imperfections and deficiencies and fallen nature are real. But they are not going to improve by sitting on our backsides on Sunday morning and hearing someone else speak. We are comfortable with the present situation, as much as we complain against it. Maybe it is time for us to move out of our comfort zone and challenge ourselves to grow. Even if no guest comes for a while, we can give service to our own family and spouse. Eventually, God will send a guest who needs what we have. And if a couple truly feels unprepared, they can attend the Home Church of another couple, until they are ready.

And we don't have to do it in a vacuum. Church structure, previously so centralized, can be used to support members, providing materials such as songbooks, CD's with the instrumental form of all our songs, Power Point presentations on Divine Principle and various forms of internal guidance, centralized 2, 7 and 21 day workshops, etc. In short, nothing would change but the central focal point. Instead of focusing on bringing guests to a centralized Sunday service, our whole church would focus on supporting Blessed Couples to bring guests to their own Home Church service.

The second discussion naturally follows from the first: what do we do about church community, Sunday school, interaction between Blessed Couples? Where will our children meet each other? Won't we be horribly isolated with this new structure? How do we connect to our vertical center, especially Hyung Jin Nim and his family?

To answer this, let us now introduce the second half of this new idea of bringing Sunday church service into our homes. Every **Saturday**, our church would essentially have a "Family and Fellowship Day". We would start with sports and energetic activities for young people in the afternoon, followed by a pot-luck supper at around 6:00 p.m., culminating in an evening of sharing and fun, filled with testimonies, small-group meetings, children's education, lectures or sermons, sharing of best practices, open mic time, entertainment and prayer; in short, everything and anything we need and want. We would be most delighted to welcome a video or live transmission from Hyung Jin Nim and Yeon Ah Nim, or any central figure that needs to speak. This is member's time; new guests are welcome, but they must come with the understanding that there will be no filter on what is said and done, that the evening pre-supposes an understanding of True Parents' life and mission, of Divine Principle. Spiritual parents would decide when to invite their spiritual children/home church members.

Now we see that the previous dilemma is fully solved: whether to have guest-friendly or member-friendly services. We need **both**, just at different times. But which should be when? Why not do home church during the rest of the week, and leave Sunday service as is, at a central location for all the members?

There are several answers to this important question, all tied in with each other. First, our church culture exists in the context of Christian culture, where Sunday morning is respected as the time to meet with God and hear God's word. Where are guests best served to hear the new Word of God, in our homes or in a central church? We answered that above: our homes provide a safer, less threatening, more tailor-made environment for spiritual children. Second, and perhaps more importantly, by giving our members the central responsibility for Sunday service, the most important weekly liturgy of our church, we send a clear and direct message to our guests and to our members: **the center of our movement is the family, not the church. The family is where we are born and where we grow, both physically and spiritually. Welcome home!**

We each need to be a leader. This desire comes from our original nature. We are all meant to be true parents, true teachers and true owners/leaders. There are not enough leadership positions right now in the church, within the current structure. Nothing less than the implementation of True Home Church will change this structure or solve this need. We must give Sunday service to our members. We must trust our Blessed Central Families with the central rite of our church, and support them to succeed.

If there is still fear or doubt among members about their ability or qualification to lead Sunday service, this can be addressed every Saturday, when we get together as families. Within a year, I believe, every Blessed Central Family can have a thriving church in their home, with at least three new members. Confidence is contagious, and there is nothing that builds confidence like tripling membership within a year!

Theologically, several things come to mind to support this initiative. First, at the Coronation Ceremony for the Kingship of God 12 years ago, True Father declared the end of the age of indemnity and the start of a new age, wherein as Blessed Central Families we have the authority to pray in our own names and match and bless our own children. We have an authority (and responsibility) now that we did not have before.

During the late 1970's, when True Father introduced the idea of Home Church, and declared that "Home Church is Our Kingdom of Heaven," most of us didn't even have families, let alone homes, and the best we could do was to go out to our neighborhoods and help people, raking leaves or running errands. This was the formation stage. During the 1990's, when True Father empowered us to pass on his Blessing through the giving out of the Holy Wine and Blessing Certificates with the four pledges on them, we moved closer to the central position, but still did not have the authority of True Parents. This was the growth stage. With the Coronation Ceremony, we now have all the elements in place for True Home Church: families with the authority of Heaven, experience in giving the Blessing, training and depth of heart. This is the final and completion stage of Home Church: actually moving the church into our homes and taking care of people there, from giving the introduction to the Principle, to guiding their eventual Blessing and family life. This fulfills our destiny as Tribal Messiahs at the same time.

Second, when we look at the Family Pledge, especially Pledge #6, we read:

천일국 주인 우리 가정은 참사랑을 중심하고 하늘부님과 참부모님의 대신가정으로서
천운을 움직이는 가정이 되어 하늘의 축복을 주변에 연결시키는 가정을 완성할 것을
맹세하나이다.

Translation: Our family, the owner of Cheon Il Guk, centering on True Love, pledges to perfect the family that moves Heavenly fortune and that connects Heaven's Blessing to our surroundings (neighborhood, community), as a **family standing in the place of** our Heavenly Parents and True Parents. (Emphasis added). This is nothing less than True Home Church, where a family becomes a central family in a community, bringing Heaven's fortune and blessing to all families around us, by standing in God and True Parents' stead, as they did for us for so many years. It is our turn now.

There are many important ramifications and implications that will have to be discussed: I think this structure ties in flawlessly with Kook Jin Nim's ideas on the Freedom Society; also, the eventual tithing that comes in when a True Home Church is established could solve the financial dilemma that Blessed Central Families face in choosing between God's work and supporting their families; and not least, we will have to clean up and prepare our homes for guests, and find possible venues and facilities for our Saturday fellowship. All of these point to positive and hopeful developments for the days and years ahead.

Dedicated to our beloved Heavenly Parent and True Parents.

Raman Montanaro
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천일국 Cheon Il Guk 01/01/09