

FFWPU USA: Chicago Family Church Is Likely To Surge In Areas Of Growth

Kunihiro Sagisaka
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Photo courtesy of Rev. Kunihiro Sagisaka

Chicago is among the fastest growing Unificationist communities in the U.S. and is currently home to 140 families in the movement. With new development goals in place for the Chicago Family Church this year, local leaders say membership is likely to surge amid other areas of anticipated growth.

"In the last few weeks, several families who didn't join our Sunday service for a long time started to come to the church," says pastor Rev. Kunihiro Sagisaka. "Our weekly engagement goal and Sunday service attendance is increasing ... The goal of our local new membership is 40 people, and our weekly witnessing engagement goal is [another] 40 people."

"We are striving to improve our performance in five focused areas," he says while pinpointing new membership, community engagement, leadership development, Marriage Blessing preparation, church income and tithing, and property management.

Since purchasing a new church property in the fall of 2018, Chicago leaders say there has been steady progress year after year in their overall efforts to revitalize the community. Today, with some phases of the church building's renovation completed, community members have ramped up their activities, including group meetups and public outreach.

"Many more people can join the main service [as we establish] a beautiful tradition and great opportunity," says Rev. Sagisaka, before noting a multi-purpose room that has created more occasions for lectures and entertainment. "It's a good space for young and older fellowship," he says, having received "many requests for a ping-pong table in the room."

The community also hosts their "Eternally Young Club" in the room, a popular game night for elders that is held twice a month. And, with greater public outreach, the local CARP chapter uses the space for their programs as well. "[In January and February], we had an average of 13 guests in our weekly CARP meetings," says Rev. Sagisaka, with 10 of them regularly studying the Divine Principle.

Rev. Sagisaka says as more young Unificationists become actively involved in the community, they have taken on various leadership roles. High school students learn about the matching and Marriage Blessing by example from young couples, while youth activities and programs led by their older peers feel more relatable. One Sunday school teacher said the transformation is palpable. "In general I grew up with a very different church environment to now," she says. "I think it's gotten better; there are many new things available for all members, and I think especially the youth feel supported."

Recurring fellowship nights are an outlet for community members to share about their personal lives, says Rev. Sagisaka, and dedicated committees of 25 ministerial coordinators and 40 ministerial supporters enhance community care and well-being. "The pastoral team and the 'First Ladies' team - a total of five of us - started praying for members every day," he says. "We feel that the unity of the prayer team is the key for our community to keep growing."