

Marching in Newburgh, NY, creating a City with a Revolutionary Spirit

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George Washington's Headquarters from April 1782 until August 1783 is where eighty people congregated and listened to righteous speeches from people who valued purity. (photograph by Daniel Case, via Wikimedia)

Was it that hourly condition of reading Father's speeches that had convinced us to have a rally "all our own," right here, in our adopted hometown, right now? The city of Newburgh on the Hudson River in the US State of New York, seventy miles (113 km.) north of New York City, certainly was the right environment for what we suddenly envisioned in our minds: to have a revolution, nothing less than that, marching down the main street together with religious leaders, parents, teachers and maybe even Mayor Audrey Carey herself; we would stand right where Revolutionary War General George Washington had gathered his soldiers, waiting for the final peace treaty between the British and his own troops. For just the two of us, though, it seemed a bit much. Creating a flyer was not so difficult, and we had one brother helping us on the computer. The next step was to get a permit from the city and from George Washington's Headquarters. With a baby in one arm, we went back and forth between the police and fire departments to deliver copies of the permit personally. We had somehow lost the original, and we didn't have much time to lose, for the rally was to take place within only a couple of weeks.

But the hardest part was yet to come: it wasn't really clear to us who exactly would participate in this rally that we had so proudly advertised all over the city. The secretary from Orange County College made things difficult by asking the names of the sponsors our flyer had described as "members of the religious community." Well, there was Nettie from the Baptist Church and a woman from a mosque, and yes, a Buddhist monk had said he would come, too. At least it was ecumenical, but who would want to walk down Broadway with two women and a monk? We decided, nevertheless, that we would hold that rally under any circumstances. A youth leader from one Catholic church was rather surprised; an event like that, she said, usually takes months of preparation, with many churches and organization involved, committees created and funds raised. We realized we had none of those things yet would still hold that rally.



This is Broadway, the main street in Newburgh, New York, down which Gale Alves and Ina Conneally led a group of righteous folk proclaiming the importance of chastity before marriage and fidelity in marriage. (photograph by Daniel Case, via Wikimedia)

Gathering momentum

The first rays of hope shone when suddenly the priest of another Catholic church called and responded with interest to the flyer that we had left at his church. Being a priest, he was deeply concerned about today's moral standards -- especially here in south Newburgh, with prostitutes parading up and down the streets at night. So, yes, he would come and bring his youth group on Saturday.

That gave us new energy, but we still had not contacted many other churches. We could see how much of a spiritual foundation members previously working in Newburgh had made and how much more we ourselves could have invested. We recontacted many guests from Women's Federation events and True Family Values workshops, but in some cases the freshness of an ongoing relationship was missing. "Haven't seen you for a while. How many months has it been?" But we also felt that people were happy to see us again. Yet not all churches could immediately relate to the theme of "purity before marriage and fidelity within." One minister of an Episcopalian church handed us a letter of protest against welfare cuts in response to our flyer. One Presbyterian pastor was not sure whether purity was something he could identify with, commenting "After all, are we pure ourselves?"

Since our church is part of the Ministerial Alliance here in Newburgh, we are somewhat protected and have the status of being underdogs, which is a friendly gesture, in a way, because ministers can see the persecution our church has had to suffer. On the other hand, who wants to be an underdog? Going back and forth between Hispanic, Black and White churches, we felt like two beach balls bouncing all over the place. Since the Catholics seemed to be more inspired about purity and fidelity than the Protestant churches, we gave it another try at Mt. St. Mary's College, where during that same week, there was an Aids Awareness Program on campus. We walked by an office that counsels gay and lesbian students and went over to a building where retired nuns lived. Would they march with us? They were already well past the age of marching, one friendly sister told us regretfully, as she showed us her aged leg. On Sunday morning we drove seventy miles to the Unification Theological Seminary in Red Hook. What we had to say was basically, Can't you all come, please? We hoped especially for the African brothers, who were great drummers and singers, to attend. Every army has drummers, so why shouldn't those nice brothers spearhead our moral revolution? They certainly would be an inspiration to our Black community in Newburgh. We also obtained the phone number of a brother who works at a radio station twice a week. We called him up and were able to advertise our rally over the radio. A day later, another radio station called up and asked if they could air an interview with us. Who were we, why were we doing it and what was the message of the rally? We felt it was best to appear in our role as two concerned mothers. Morality in the media, in schools, in health institutions -- that's what we were looking for and couldn't find. Who can say anything against a concerned mother? The only surprising fact was that these mothers seemed to have such a large pool of unusual contacts to draw from -- monks, imams, ministers... But the interview was friendly, and the interviewer congratulated our efforts.

The fateful day

Saturday came, and the weather was bad. Someone took the balloons we had blown up over to the priest's office, where they floated feebly over his desk. Fortunately, we had a rain date set, which was March 28.

That we now had more time to prepare and to contact more people was good. Besides, March 28 was True Parents Day, which we could celebrate simultaneously with the rally.

We hoped that Michael Balcomb and Robert Kittel from the Pure Love Alliance, who had promised to come, might find it easy to drive up here from Belvedere and maybe bring other families with them from there. We had already received seven megaphones from them. Another substantial contribution from the Redhook Sunday School was twenty-two creative signs for the march, with slogans like "Fidelity Forever" and "Save Sex, Not Safe Sex." One sister from our own community had contributed a banner we could all march behind.



Finally True Parents Day (celebrated by our members worldwide) and True Love Day celebrated locally arrived. Although we had taken our kids out sledding the previous weekend, that Saturday we might have felt inclined to get out our beach chairs, if it had not been for the rally. A tropical breeze blew through our thirty-six balloons as we carried them over to the parking lot where we would meet all those righteous, pure-minded people.

While walking all the way down Broadway ourselves (to see how long it took) we had made up some slogans to shout for the march. "Don't be a fool purity is cool." "That's the rule -- marriage is a jewel!" Those slogans were handed out first to the imam from the mosque, who had arrived with his youth group along with more balloons. A few minutes later, Father Jater, the priest, arrived with his group bringing along their homemade church banner. One after another, people came together, while five police cars waited for us to start the rally. Among about sixty participants, twenty of our church members were present. David (Sang-chul) Kim [1915–2011] the seminary president suddenly appeared, taking pictures and wishing us much luck.

It was time to start. We looked at each other and felt suddenly the pressure of it all. Boy! We hadn't done anything like this before. Couldn't Robert or Michael just lead all those people down Broadway, with us marching behind? But the police cars had already entered Broadway and we had to keep up.

Right behind the front banner walked the Muslim imam, the Catholic priest, an evangelical minister, a Mormon bishop and the Buddhist monk. People came out of their shops to see what was going on while cars drove slowly by. Since our group was diverse in character, it wasn't easy to have everyone sing and shout at the same time, but we knew already that this wasn't going to be like one of the strongly unified Pure Love walks -- it was rather an of-the-community-for-the-community potluck type of march.

Leadership and strategy

Half an hour later, we arrived at George Washington's Headquarters. The stone stool that Washington had used to mount his horse was now our speakers' podium. First we greeted everyone and then read a proclamation of our "revolutionary army" that called for a society of God-centered true love and stated that true parents and true children with purity and fidelity were the two pillars that hold America up. The speech ended with George Washington's final words to his officers on March 15, 1783, "Had this day not been, the world would have never seen the last stage of perfection that humankind is capable of attaining."

Father Bill then weighed heavily upon our hearts as he told the story of a pure, young girl whose schoolmate had killed her because she did not want to have sex with him. The imam, Mohammed, who had conducted a prison ministry for some time, pointed out the relationship between a lack of parental love and the seeking of premature sexual love instead. Between the speeches that clergy members gave, Diesa Seidel, a second-generation Unificationist sister from Redhook, New York, overlaid a fresh spirit on the grave messages of the speakers she followed with her testimony. Finally, Michael Balcomb concluded the purity–fidelity circle by saying that without absolute values, America will continue to have problems. We then mentioned the names of other churches that were unable to participate but that had verbally expressed their support. More people had arrived by then, so we counted between seventy to eighty participants.

After God received a final prayer, the rally concluded, and the crowd dispersed. We then shared a light luncheon in one of our member's homes with almost all the speakers present. We both felt that though small in number, this "declaration of a moral revolution" was truly significant. We had personally invited almost everyone who participated. These people were not mere bystanders. Almost all of them were activists in their own religious and moral-educational fields.

Thinking of how doubtful we ourselves had been at times, when our dream seemed not much more than a nice idea, we realized once again, that without God as our general and True Father's strategy of relying on spiritual support, we would not have been able to make this rally a success. But with our church family's network and inspiration, we overcame all obstacles and rose to win all battles.



A view of downtown Newburgh, New York. The photographer (Daniel Case, via Wikimedia) took this shot from Beacon, New York, across the Hudson River, from Newburgh.