

Gary Chidester elected as the new District 5 Pastor - Bruce Grodner, Randy Francis and Thomas Cutts have passed their batons

Ariana Moon
November 20, 2012



Birthdays of Marc Chidester April 2011. (Marc - seated) Gary Chidester, Maria Pia Chidester, Jessica Chidester, Valerie Chidester (standing, left to right)

With the nomination of Gary Chidester as the new District Pastor for District Five (states), the first-ever District Elections in the Unification Church USA have finally come to a close. Most of the District Pastors have been re-elected by their newly-formed District Councils, yet Rev. Bruce Grodner of District 2, Rev. Randy Francis of District 1, and Rev. Thomas Cutts of District 5 have passed their batons to Andrew Compton, Henri and Loretta Schauffler, and Gary Chidester, respectively.

The second son of a second son of a second son, Gary Chidester was born on a US Air Force military base in Louisiana to a devout Catholic couple from Arkansas as one of four sons and two daughters. He attended high school in Japan at a US Air Force installation and the year after in 1973, was the first member from Arkansas to join the Unification Church. He was Blessed in marriage in 1986 to Maria Pia Salvati of Italy and they now have three children and reside in Miami, Florida.

Chidester has served as state leader of the church in Mississippi, Delaware and Alabama and has founded Collegiate Association for the Research of Principles (CARP) chapters on six campuses. He graduated from the Southern Connecticut State College in 1982 with a degree in Philosophy and was hand-picked by Rev. Sun Myung Moon to attend the Divinity program at the Unification Theological Seminary in Barrytown, NY. After graduating with a Masters of Divinity and Religious Education in 1985, he served in the Philippines with Religious Youth Service (RYS), then served in Florida as state director of American Constitution Committee (ACC) and state director, vice-regional director and regional director of American Freedom Coalition (AFC) until 2012.

“The leadership of our church in America is going through a dramatic change,” said Chidester. “In my life of faith, since I joined at 18 years old, I felt the mysterious hand of God upon me. It was only a few months later that I found myself in a position to serve as the state leader of Mississippi because the previous leader had left. I did not seek it out, but it was thrust upon me. Time and again I was asked to take more responsibilities, even amidst derision, persecution and skepticism, yet great things happened again and again.

“I am grateful for the opportunity to serve again. I am happy to be a part of this change. God is not finished with me yet as He asking me to step forward again. I am grateful for this opportunity.”



Rev. Bruce Grodner, former District Pastor of District 2.

Honoring Our Former District Pastors

The following are comments of support from Unificationists who have worked together with Rev. Grodner, Rev. Francis, and Rev. Cutts, respectively.

Rev. David Rendel, director of operations at HSA-UWC: “I appreciate and respect Rev. Grodner’s heart of caring for members. He has a very authentic love for everyone, as well as a positive and hopeful perspective that is very refreshing. It’s been a real pleasure to work with him from that point of view, and I’m sure everyone appreciates the quality of his character, which is genuine and loving.”

Douglas Burton, director of Public Affairs at HSA-UWC: “I greatly admire Rev. Bruce Grodner’s courage under difficult circumstances. I assisted him to stage an American Clergy Leadership Conference (ACLC) concert on September 9, 2012 and there were some who urged to cancel the event, which was a big financial investment. But he pushed on and created a wonderful musical reunion of ACLC pastors. His courage and good judgment no doubt is tempered by decades of service to True Parents.”

Dr. Tyler Hendricks, director of Education at HSA-UWC: “We love Rev. Grodner. His grasp of True Parents' heart and God's heart is very deep. He motivated us to do ministry and reach out and tell others about our faith. He could convey the love of God in a very tangible way, and is an excellent model of faith and love for us to emulate. He could reach people of all races, nations and religions with a totally humble and serving spirit, to bring True Parents' love to New York.”



Rev. Randy Francis, former District Pastor of District 1.

Beverly Berndt, school teacher at New Hope Academy: “Rev. Randy Francis is one of the most supportive and 24/7/365 leaders I have ever worked with in my 42 years. He is kind, considerate, and always tried his best to understand everyone's viewpoint and line it up with the vertical perspective in a very subtle and nonthreatening way. I personally learned a lot about patience from him. He preferred to support and empower rather than take credit for himself. He cares deeply for our region, the members, and God's Providence. I have thoroughly enjoyed working with him and look forward to continuing working with him to support the Schaufillers.”

Kaeleight Moffitt, youth pastor in Maryland: “Rev. Francis is easily the hardest working person I know and manages to balance that incredible work ethic with a deep love and concern for our community. He can speak for great lengths about the unique value of each family in our community despite our large size and changing demographics. It's been an honor to work with him because of his forward thinking, open mind and unwavering dedication. District 1 has benefited greatly from having Rev. Francis as our District Pastor, and even more so, I have personally benefited from having Rev. Francis as my mentor.”



Rev. Tom Cutts, former District Pastor of District 5.

David Tranberg, District 5 Council member: “Rev. Cutts is a highly dedicated and brilliant fellow who was critical to the church’s success over the past 30 years. He has great talents in diplomacy and dealing with the public, and we appreciate all that he did for our region. He’s been leaders in ACC, AFC, ACLC

and he's been basically the point man in District 5 for several decades!"

Haruki Kimura, District 5 Council member: "I have worked with Rev. Tom Cutts for over 20 years directly and indirectly. I have a great respect for him for his strong faith in God and True Parents and for his high moral work ethic. He has made outstanding accomplishments and tremendous contributions for God's Providences in our district and region, and I deeply thank him for his dedication. I have witnessed how God has worked through him in many difficult and challenging times and brought victories for God and True Parents."

Nandi Moton, Women's Federation for World Peace (WFWP) chairman in Georgia: "We are grateful to Rev. Tom Cutts. He is leaving an indelible mark with the strong foundation he built for ACLC and the Georgia Horizon Summer workshops he spearheaded for our young Unificationists, just to name a few. We thank him, our pastor and our elder brother, his beautiful wife Angelika Cutts and their whole family for the sacrifices they have made and will continue to make for God and True Parents."