

National BFM USA held a national gathering of BFM leaders at IPEC in Las Vegas

Crescentia DeGoede
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From May 9 to 12, the National BFM in partnership with the Subregional BFM Coordinators held a national gathering of BFM leaders in the areas of matching education and support, marriage enrichment, and family empowerment in Las Vegas at the International Peace Education Center. A total of 75 participants spent four days networking, developing stronger relationships, and discussing how to effectively support the new, younger and older Blessed Families in our movement. Participants came from all 5 subregions and Canada. Participants included Pastors, BFM Coordinators, Matching Supporters and Couple Care providers.

"This retreat was life-giving for me. I got so much more out of it than I expected, especially in the way of experiencing God's deep love and encouragement for me and the work I am doing. Practically, it provided the platform needed to jumpstart our work within our subregion and district. As a pastor, the retreat gave me a deeper understanding of how BFM can support our community in our outreach efforts and family care." – Mika Deshotel, Connecticut, SR1



The retreat opened on Thursday evening with some icebreakers and inspirational testimonies from local BFM leaders across the country about the work they are doing with the BFM and how it is positively impacting themselves and others.

"It was a great opportunity to connect to the Heart of True Mother and True Parents about the Blessing and to feel more deeply the calling of the BFM. My heart of longing to connect with knowledge and experience and feel the synergy of community and infrastructure building was healed. I was reassured that I am not alone. My husband was with me and he could catch the mission of BFM first-hand!!! – Donna Avey, Alaska, SR5



Friday was a day full of presentations, discussions, and meetings by subregion. Friday morning National BFM Director, Crescentia DeGoede gave a presentation on "BFM's Role in the Providence". She shared based on her own experiences of True Mother's heart towards God and humankind, outlined three main ways BFM contributes to the Providence at this time, and encouraged participants to invest even more in their BFM work for the sake of supporting God's Providence at this time. Matching Supporter Coordinator, John Abelseth, Subregion 5 BFM Coordinator, Peter Chen, and Crescentia then shared about "Creating a BFM Community Support System". They provided descriptions of each of the roles, responsibilities and training and support in a BFM team and how to effectively work together and expand the team. The retreat was very blessed to have two staff from the International Blessed Family Department participate: Assistant Director, Katsuyoshi Motoyama, and Administrator, Monika Lajdová. They gave a presentation on the upcoming Cosmic Blessing and international matching tools and resources. The rest of the time they spent listening to participants and answering questions, which was very much appreciated by participants.

"I have gotten several ideas for programs that we can do in our community to support our Blessed Families in various areas. Parenting Education, Couples Ministry, Senior Ministry, etc. It was great to have an opportunity to meet as a subregion to start planning further activities and interactions." – Roger Wetherall, Connecticut, SR1

Friday afternoon participants broke into groups by subregion to connect and share with one another and discuss ideas and plans. This was followed by breakout presentations, in which participants were able to participate in two of the five options: Offering Marriage Enrichment Programming by Daniela and Roger Wetherall and Kayeon Wise, Next Level Matching Supporting by John Abelseth and Marjorie Buessing, Supporting First Gen Singles by Anne-Marie Mylar and Tina Zelada, Hosting Blessing Education Programs by Crescentia DeGoede and Kaeleigh Moffit, and Healing and Crises Care by Hilde Wiemann and John Williams. In the evening participants had the chance to relax and have fun with their choice of "self-care stations" which included: a spa room, emotion/body code healing, acupuncture, meditation, food is love and board games.



"Through this retreat, my motivation to help BFM has greatly increased. My relationship with God has been strengthened as well as my appreciation of His love for me and others. Through Crescentia, I could connect with True Mothers heart more strongly than ever before." – Pierre Beaugard, Montreal, Canada

Saturday was a time for sharing best practices and learning how to collaborate with Pastors and Other Ministry Leaders. In the morning participants heard a powerful message from Bay Area Family Church Pastor, Rev. Thompson about the importance of investing in our family relationships. The rest of the morning, participants could choose two of the five breakouts offered, which included: Parenting Education/Support by Myrna Lapres and Hilde Wiemann, High Noon by Benjy Uyama and John Williams, Addressing Unique Matching Situations by John Abelseth, Anne-Marie Mylar, and Sandra Lowen, Conducting Blessing Interviews by Marjorie Buessing and Ayako Heller, and Organizing Matching Support Meetings for Parents by Peter and Klara Chen.



In the afternoon there was a panel of speakers on "Effective Partnering with Pastor and Other Ministry Leaders". Subregion 2 BFM Coordinator Judie LeJeune and Subregion 3 BFM Coordinator Charles Cherutich shared about working effectively with pastors. Then presentations about programs and

resources were given by TribeNet Marketing Director, Michael Holmes, Education Director, Mari Curry, and YAYAM (Youth and Young Adult Ministry) Directors, Kaeleigh Moffit and Tasnah Bercy. Then each subregion met to discuss and share inspirations shared and next steps as a subregion. The rest of the day was spent taking in God's beautiful creation at the Red Rock Canyon and enjoying a delicious buffet dinner together.



The retreat concluded on Sunday with a final message from Crescentia of gratitude to all parents and mentors for the important role they play in their children's and mentees' lives, and encouragement to each participant to connect with God's love for them and each other. Then each subregion shared a report on what they discussed and decided as a subregion over the course of the retreat. This was followed by a panel of HQ BFM Staff that answered final questions from the audience. Clarification on many important BFM related topics was given. The retreat ended with participants sharing beautiful and inspiring testimonies about their experience at the retreat.



Testimonies from Participants

"I have new energy to continue doing and now grow the BFM work in my community. I have resources to help me actually make changes and implement new ideas. I received new ideas to try in my own community and gained a regional support network of people to learn from, work together with, and receive support and energy from. One of the biggest benefits of the retreat is a renewed energy and hope for the work of BFM. It is easy to become tired and discouraged and see only the large gap between what we have and where we want to be. This retreat reminded me of all the positive things already happening in my community and nationally, and gave me hope for being able to provide even more for our families. The retreat showed me that our national movement values our families and that energized me to make me hopeful for our movement in America." – Kai Wise, Washington, SR5



"This retreat was a great place to connect and get inspiration about the awesome things that are going on around the country. People are so creative and have invested a lot into certain great programs that we can inherit so easily in our own local communities! I gained an understanding of the needs in my community and a desire to do something about it! There are a few programs we need, that I want and I would be excited to start with my husband." – Rosia Schmidt, Chicago, SR3



"I feel more connected, enriched and empowered. I was given tools for me to grow and to share with others. The retreat was very timely for some painful crisis in our family; to see it as an opportunity to do the growing which did not happen before. This will be the foundation for better growing our community and outreach." –Texas, SR4



"As a pastor, I was unfamiliar with all that BFM is doing and was grateful to come to understand more. I received a lot of encouragement, inspiration, and hope to see all that BFM is doing and the testimonies of those who have been working in this area." – Charles de Watteville, Sacramento, SR5



"I gained more confidence and many good ideas about how to strengthen our subregional BFM. Hearing from the other subregional communities was the most helpful. More than anything I gained tremendous hope for the future of 2nd Gen embracing the world with of love and education. I am also so impressed by Kaeleigh and Tasnah. Now, more than ever we are seeing the 1st and 2nd gen working together." – Judie Lejeune, Virginia, SR2 BFM Coordinator



"I feel enriched, valued, and strengthened by meeting and networking with other Matching Supporters. In this important work we are doing, we need each other, to network and support each other. To meet together on this personal level is especially essential to be effective. After participating in this retreat, I want to do more and inspire others to become Matching Supporters." – Marianne Irwin, L.A., SR5



"One of the most important things is that we're no longer alone in the outback of Canada! We have made friends, found people who have the knowledge and skills we are lacking and I have also found needs here, where I feel I can contribute." – Andrea and Boris Kuhn, Canada



"I hope more BFM leaders, pastors, church leaders, and even if possible YAM coordinators can come to this retreat next time. I think people need to see how we can complement each other and work together for the same goal. Only when we are in the same room and talk about what's going on in the community, can we begin to understand how we are all meant to work together." – Akira Watanabe, Las Vegas, SR4