

Family Church of Connecticut's Annual Volunteer Retreat for Ministry Leaders

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On Saturday, September 8 approximately 35 Unificationists from the Family Church of Connecticut gathered at the Unification Theological Seminary (UTS) in Barrytown, New York to take part in the third annual Volunteer Retreat for ministry leaders and core staff members.

The purpose of the two-day gathering was to kickstart another year of local activities. The represented ministries were Children's Ministry, Youth Ministry, Outreach Team, Blessing and Family Ministry, and Worship Team, along with American Clergy Leadership Conference of Connecticut and Universal Peace Federation of Connecticut.

The retreat's main goals were creating intergenerational dialogue and collaboration across the ministries, as well as focusing on the purpose of doing ministry. Just as True Mother recently directed all the movement's leaders to take part in a three-day devotion period at Cheongpyeong instead of the scheduled Cheon Il Guk leaders' meeting, Pastors Abe and Mika Deshotel of the Family Church of Connecticut wanted to have the volunteers spend more time coming together in unity centering on a deep, internal commitment to True Parents and the Providence.

The program officially began late Saturday morning as participants arrived at the UTS grounds from Connecticut. The afternoon session featured a talk by Dr. Andrew Wilson, a professor of religious studies at UTS, who addressed older members of the group as well as members of the Evergreen Club, a 55-and-over senior group of the Family Church of Connecticut. Dr. Wilson's presentation was titled "Our Life of Faith after True Parents' Passing." His style of presentation, featuring many open-ended and jarring questions, led to a lively discussion afterward. Outreach Team member Keiko said, "Dr. Wilson's lecture helped me reflect on what I believe and what I should be doing for the future. It also clarified the value of giving the Blessing to people."

The remainder of the retreat was led by Kent Hoffman, a recent graduate of the Divine Principle Masters Lecture Training Program, who incorporated his personal experiences as a Unificationist leader into each session. The sessions focused on creating greater openness, exploring the "whys" of one's commitment, and connecting with others through authenticity.

The following day, a special joint Sunday Service was held in the UTS main chapel as a natural conclusion to the weekend. The special service was a first-time collaboration between the Family Church of Connecticut and the Mid-Hudson Valley (New York) Family Church. Young Unificationists who had arrived at Barrytown for the kickoff of the 2018-2019 Generation Peace Academy (GPA) also joined the service. The chapel was overflowing not only with participants but also with heart, love, and worship.

The main speaker was none other than the Northeast Subregional (SR-1) Director, Rev. Demian Dunkley,

who spoke on the topic of "True Mother." Pastor Mika opened with a prayer welcoming True Parents' spirit into the space and expressing gratitude for the incredible memories with True Parents and brothers and sisters on the UTS grounds over the years.

Congregants had the pleasure of listening to local Unificationist Diane Kelalu on her recent experience in Korea attending the Global Top Gun Youth program. Diane tearfully described her feelings of immense love and gratitude for True Parents during her time there and seeing the power of true love overcoming barriers between language and culture. It was a perfect segue into Rev. Dunkley's message on True Mother, as Diane's testimony primed the audience to consider our own personal experiences with True Parents.



Demian began his message with some important updates on the Peace Starts with Me rally in November, which included a walkthrough of the Nassau Coliseum (the rally venue, located on New York's Long Island), the organizers, and the overall flow of the program and major goals of the rally. True Mother only recently confirmed she would come after Dr. Ki Hoon Kim, Regional Chairman of Family Federation North America, reported to her the preparations being made for this rally. Dr. Kim said her excitement was the result of feeling the United States is finally standing up and taking responsibility as the Elder Son nation in God's providence in leading the world back to God. Demian explained how a key difference between this rally and last year's rally at Madison Square Garden is that this time the venue, date, and purpose are all coming from America with a continual shift and a rising up of real ownership by American Unificationists.

He went on to declare how our hearts toward the peace rally should be one of wanting to energize True Mother as she makes her way to South Africa and later to Nepal. "This is Christianity welcoming the Only Begotten Daughter," Demian said. "This is our 'million dollar commercial' for True Parents that we can share with the rest of the world to get the world excited and ready to welcome the Only Begotten Daughter. This is truly the role of the Elder Son nation."

This special joint service gave the participants a chance to connect with the SR-1 vision heading in to the upcoming peace rally in November, and helped with understanding how the United States can take more ownership as the Elder Son nation. It also provided a great foundation for each local community to consider how much they would be willing to pledge in support of the rally. Those interested in supporting this coming rally can make their [donation here](#).

Photos contributed by Shoji Torikai.