

Leena Vincenz-Gavin, National Children's Ministry Director, Visits Seattle, WA

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February 2, 2020



Leena Vincenz-Gavin, director of the Family Federation for World Peace and Unification (FFWPU) National Children's Ministry, visited Seattle, Washington from January 31 to February 2 to host a weekend of Children's Ministry activities to engage young families and build connection, community and momentum

It was an amazing experience traveling to Seattle, Washington! Pastor Nelson Mira of the Seattle Family Church invited me for the weekend. Leading up to the visit I worked closely with Pastor Nelson, as well as Sunday School Director Alena Avramenko and local Unificationist Kayeon Wise, who represented the young parents.



When I arrived on January 31, Pastor Nelson gave me a tour of the Seattle Family Church and the Windermere Worship Center. I was honored to stay at Windermere, a location frequented by True

Parents, and could feel a holy presence throughout the property. True Parents is an affectionate term used by Unificationists when referring to Dr. Hak Ja Han Moon and her late husband Rev. Dr. Sun Myung Moon, co-founders of FFWPU.

The next day, around 10 young families from Seattle, Tacoma and Bellingham joined together at the Windermere home for the Young Family Gathering! The young Unificationist parents were able to engage in dynamic discussions while the children were entertained downstairs.



I began by sharing about the vision of National Children's Ministry and the resources we offer to communities. We all introduced ourselves and I got to learn more about the three unique communities. Everyone was very excited!

We spent the rest of the time in discussion, talking about parenting our children in the Unificationist faith and our desire to have a supportive community. Several young parents mentioned they realized that if there were areas that needed more support, then they should be the ones to take on the responsibility. Parents shared their fond memories of summer camps and holy days and how they want to pass on these experiences to their children. This summer, Camp Tongil will include a Family Camp!

Parents also discussed their ongoing search for a pastor. They are passionately looking for someone to lead them and give a clear vision to the community with inspiring Sunday services. Next, we held an engaging conversation on the future of the church building. Everyone expressed their desire to invest in the current building and upgrade it to create a more welcoming environment that God and True Parents can be proud of!

Another challenge for the community is that they are very spread out and never know when other parents and children will attend. So all the young families decided to commit to coming on the same Sunday once a month! This is a huge step and will ensure that there are enough kids for Sunday school. It will also build connection, community and momentum for the young parents to gather together more regularly at church. The community is also initiating Sunday school for preschoolers. The Seattle Children's Ministry now has a Facebook page with events scheduled for February and March!

I am very inspired by the action that resulted from my visit. One parent shared, "It was great for like-minded families to come together and take part in the future for our children." I feel so honored to have been a part of bringing everyone together and helping them feel supported to take ownership!

Later in the afternoon, several young families, pastors and youth volunteers came together to upgrade the Seattle Sunday School rooms! The Seattle Family Church and young parents made generous donations towards the cause! Based on designs I created ahead of time in collaboration with Alena Avramenko, we painted and redid the preschool "woodland" classroom, the elementary "ocean" classroom and the middle school "mountain" classroom, all inspired by nature found around Seattle. The youth were very involved and excited about the process!

"Hopefully the external makeover and refreshment will influence the overall spirit of Sunday school," shared a Sunday school teacher. "Children already feel happier, more joyful and uplifted. They were happy to add the last few touches themselves."

On my last day, Pastor Nelson and his wife took me out for a delicious breakfast in the morning. Then at the Seattle Family Church, I met with the Sunday school teachers who were blown away by the new classrooms! They have been working so hard, and I believed they felt a lot of love and care for their ministry. Before service, I engaged children of various ages in worship dance songs and a mini preschool lesson.



Then I was asked to give the sermon and spoke on "Raising God's Children." I shared about the value of children, our role as parents and as a community, and the impact we can make. I reminded everyone that we are children of God and concluded by sharing about the value of Children's Ministry in church growth. Everyone was really excited and inspired.

Afterward, I made my way to Bellingham where I met Pastor Neville LaBrooy, who was appointed as the Bellingham Family Church pastor just two months ago. We had a great time discussing church growth, children's education and Divine Principle education.

Lastly, I visited all of the local young families in Bellingham at their young family Super Bowl party! At this informal meeting, we got to know one another in small group discussions. They were inspired to learn about the Children's Ministry resources and are excited to get together regularly as young families.

Bellingham Family Church is unique as there are more children (15 kids under the age of four) than adults! It is naturally very family-focused and has a huge potential for growth! Tiffany LaBrooy, coordinator for Sunday school, shared about their local Sunday school and her determination to bring it to the next level.

In conclusion, I am excited to visit more communities in 2020! The first visit of the year started off with a bang! It was so awesome to serve and love them up as a representative of the National Children's Ministry.

Several Unificationists involved commented on the impact of Vincenz-Gavin's weekend in Washington, including Pastor Nelson, who shared, "Leena's visit gave me more hope for the future of our community. I am now more committed to supporting our Sunday School Ministry."