

Headquarters Staff Jonathan Gullery, Koichi Nakai, Shinyoung Chang and Leehee Wolf Share “What the Holiday Season Means to Me”: Part Two

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Shinyoung Chang top row far left. Paul Werner is sitting by the poinsettias. Bob Duffy is conducting. Toronto Church center.

Christmas Day, God’s Day, New Year’s Eve, and the Day of Victory of Love. Two holidays established in one religious community within the last 50 years and two holidays that have been a significant part of human history for centuries. All four of which, until recently, took place within the span of one week*. With so many festivities to plan in so short a time, what have Unificationists in the United States done to celebrate these holidays? What traditions were blended as a result of being part of a multi-racial, multi-religious, and multi-cultural movement that seeks to uphold the teachings of Rev. and Mrs. Sun Myung Moon, the “True Parents?”

For many, the end of the year means parties, reckless behavior and copious amounts of alcohol, but for most Unificationists, the end of December provides an opportunity for deep contemplation. Christmas is a time for engaging in fellowship amongst church members, New Year’s Eve encourages families to establish resolutions through religious conditions and God’s Day inspires many to rededicate their faith to God and True Parents. Employees at HSA-UWC, first- and second-generation Unificationists from various walks of life, share brief accounts of their holiday traditions below.

*God’s Day, originally celebrated on January 1st, is as of 2010 based on the lunar calendar. God’s Day in year 2013 will take place on February 10th.

Testimonies from the Communications Team



Stephen and Shinyoung Simonds, xmas, croton-on-Hudson, NY, 2010

Shinyoung Chang, editor-in-chief of UC Magazine: “In Toronto, our pastor, Paul Werner, would put up a big tree, and we’d celebrate Christmas all together at church. It was so much fun when I was a kid, so much fun! Every kid got a bag full of candy of all the good stuff – O Henry bars, Snickers bars, Kit Kat bars, Tootsie Rolls, etc. We had drawing contests and singing contests with prizes for kids – that was our entertainment! –and all the families would come for this. The tables would be lined up in a horse-shoe configuration so that everyone could see each other. Our pastor was so cool. Within our family, we would also watch every single Christmas show that was on television. We didn’t get DVDs; it had to be on the television. It was something about knowing that everyone else in the world – at least in Toronto – was watching with us that made it special. At midnight we always watched A Christmas Carol at midnight on Christmas Eve. We never missed a year growing up. I still do this, even if I’m on my own.

“For God’s Day, in our home, we did *Hoon Dok Hwe* and participated in the Korean New Year’s tradition of giving and receiving money, *kyungbae*’s to the parents, kisses and hugs and a family photo. For church, we gathered as a community at the local holy rock or holy tree to pray at midnight on New Year’s Eve (or God’s Day Eve). We found this hysterical because for us, our holy tree was in the heart of downtown Toronto, right outside City Hall. So, at midnight, we’d gather around this tree in the freezing cold in City Hall Park to pray, and the cops would be somewhat perplexed as to what we were doing there. The pastor would then name out literally everyone single member in Canada and it would take like an hour. After our unison prayer, we would do *mansei*. I kept that tradition, so every New Year’s Eve, I go to the holy tree or rock in whatever city I’m in, usually with a small number of people, and we sing and pray. That’s my favorite part of God’s Day.”



Koichi Nakai, creative director of Communications: “For God’s Day we would as a family go to Pennsylvania and participate in a church retreat in the Poconos. There, we’d do a midnight prayer around a fire as a community, and the next day, we would celebrate with food and an offering table, watch the broadcast from Korea, and enjoy each other’s company. I go to church every weekend with my wife and my two sons, Miles and Skylar, who go to Sunday school. At dinner, Miles prays for us. He loves to do it. Simply having a grateful heart during the holiday season is something I want my children to inherit.”



Leehee Wolf, designer: As a rather large family of eight with all children born little more than a year apart, the Wolf household is always lively. This is especially so during the holiday season, wherein we have every opportunity to exercise our creative tendencies and enjoy nostalgic traditions. With the exception of the occasional party or spiritual family gathering, the holidays are spent nice and snug at home. However, whether we venture out or stay in, no matter the holiday, as with every task we do, we put in our all. At Halloween, we spend a solid month planning and sewing our costumes. Thanksgiving comes around, and we spend the day together making cakes, pies, and side dishes galore based off of recipes, both handed down and of our own machinations. Christmas is often spent in an assembly line of an abundance of chocolates and gift baskets, so we are ready at any moment to furnish anyone we encounter with presents. God’s Day usually encompasses some kind of movie/television marathon leading up to midnight. If I had to fit the Wolf holidays into a neat little nutshell, I would simply say games, food, movie, dessert. What makes everything special though is that the merriment does not start until we invite God to the party.



Jonathan Gullery, designer: “Our Christmas traditions involve decorating the house, the tree, and of course, giving gifts. We were always trying to figure out our blend of traditions, the way I grew up in my family in New Zealand, how my wife Debby celebrated holidays in her family in Canada, and we could create our own family tradition reflecting all that, and our Unificationist life. We’ve always been conscious of not doing an ‘over the top’ Christmas celebration because God’s Day was just a week later and we wanted God’s Day and other church holidays to be just as special and fun for the kids. It was a challenge!

“Debby, who is the director of counseling in the Blessed Family Department, and I struggled a bit when we were raising our kids because we both had public missions within the church, which meant that we were often working on church holidays. I worked in the publications department for years, and during church holidays, we would have a sales table out in the mezzanine of the New Yorker Hotel. Members would come from around the world to celebrate and meet with True Parents, and they were always excited to see the latest material from America.

“We would keep one special gift for our kids on God’s Day, as well as prepare an offering table. Our ‘stacks’ were certainly not too spectacular. If we got to three levels of apples we were hitting the big time! We’d make some kind of banner and always had our children help with all this, so it was *our* celebration, our family’s way of connecting to True Parents’ tradition. We usually had Korean food on church holidays. We’d shop at Korean food markets and then make dishes like *bulgogi* and eat it with *kimchi*. That was a special thing, because the whole family looked forward to it, and we felt it was nourishing us in some spiritual way. (See how creative we were!)

“One time, my mom made a fruitcake and mailed it to me in New York from New Zealand for Christmas. She knew how much I loved her special Christmas cake. So, I got this big, heavy package in the mail and inside was this great, big, incredible cake. Back then, it was the tradition within our church to offer something up when we received it, so I gave the cake to Mose (then serving as church president) and Onni Durst. They took the cake and gave it to True Parents at East Garden. It was a pretty spectacular looking cake! When they told me that Father really liked the cake, I was so happy. My mother, on the other hand, was not. She wasn’t too fond of Rev. Moon at that time, and she was so upset that she had gone through all that trouble to send me a cake that I just ended up giving away to ‘some other parent.’ The lesson I learned there was that maybe that hadn’t been the best way to witness to my mom!

“As a family, we would sometimes go up to Canada to celebrate Christmas with Debby’s relatives. On God’s Day Eve, we still get together with other families in Westchester (New York), following the tradition of writing down a list of things from the old year we want to do away with, burn those, and then make resolutions for the new year. One time, Debby’s dad was visiting, and he participated in that tradition, and he was quite impressed that we as Unificationists would do something so nice and meaningful during the time that most people were just partying.

“We’ve always tried to do something extra special on our church holidays. It was all pretty easy when our three kids were little. As they became teenagers we very often had to be much more creative. Reluctant teenage participation is not too much fun, so we were constantly being creative in finding ways to celebrate, while being respectful of the deep spiritual meaning of each of our church holidays.

“As we prepare our house for Christmas this year, we’re mindful of the fact that our kids are all grown and beginning to develop their own holiday traditions. They’re all coming home next week though, and we’re really excited to have the house full of too many people and their pets! We’ll have a wonderful, chaotic, happy holiday.”