

Shota Iwasaki's rally against *Thou Shalt Commit Adultery* billboard

Ariana Moon
February 5, 2013



Approximately 20 Unificationists and clergy from various congregations gathered at the Steen Outdoor Advertising building on 3201 South 26th Street in Philadelphia, to protest a billboard that reads “Thou Shalt Commit Adultery.” The group gathered in chilly, windy weather at 1:30 p.m. on February 5, 2013.

An advertising company that owns several billboards in Pennsylvania, Steen, was responsible for allowing arrangementfinders.com, an exclusive online service that connects men and women for “Mutually Beneficial Arrangements” to advertise their services. The press release for the rally, sent out to local media lists by the Headquarters Public Affairs department, was published on www.metro.us earlier today. Radio station 106.9 interviewed the organizer of the rally and is expected to air their story Wednesday, Jan 6th between 4 p.m. and 9 p.m.



Ministers from various Christian churches who united together to protest and speak to Steen representative

Unificationists who gathered on site included the Pastor of Unification churches in Pennsylvania and Delaware, Rev. Shota Iwasaki, Ms. Jizly Dohou, Chairwoman of Women’s Federation for World Peace (WFWP) in Pennsylvania as well as WFWP staff Alice Kaady and Baochu Shimizu, local pastors Crescentia and Leighton DeGoede and youth pastor Michael Diamond.

Clergy and activists included Bishop Wesley Ledbetter, Minister Nina Ledbetter and Vice-Bishop Larry Rivers of the Mt. Zion Pentecostal Church, Bishop Ricky Sutton of the Church of Our Lord Jesus Christ, Pastor DuVanna Scott of the Pentecostal Restoration Community Church and Loretta Graham, the spokesperson for the Pennsylvania Family Coalition.

At 1:30 p.m., the multi-religious gathering separated into two groups; one outside of Steen’s building with signs protesting the use of the billboard and the other attempting to enter the building to try to meet with Steen representatives. The rally itself drew reporters from FOX News and the *Philadelphia Daily News*, as well as a follow up interview with Rev. Iwasaki by radio station 106.9, which is scheduled to air tomorrow, according to Leighton DeGoede.

Michael Diamond, a youth pastor for the Unificationist community in Philadelphia said: “I was really

inspired by the rally today because for me, it was an issue that crosses all races, colors, creeds and religions, theists and atheists alike. It was the first rally and protest I actually felt comfortable at because I wasn't trying to impose my religious beliefs on anyone because adultery affects *everyone*. It was inspiring to get together with ministers from different congregations to try to get this sign taken down and to have media come to our little rally.”



Protesting outside of Steen building

The rally was organized by Rev. Iwasaki, who upon seeing the sign near the interstate highway last week, notified the local Unificationist community and asked members to call Steen and express their outrage about this billboard, which according to Crescentia DeGoede, several members were glad to do. As part of the Kingdom Builders Fellowship of Christian Churches in Philadelphia, an organization that connects about 80 or so local churches of different Christian denominations, Rev. Iwasaki brought the issue to the members of that Fellowship and asked the clergy gathered there to support him in protesting the billboard.

“As soon as we walked in, a lady told us that this was private property and that we needed to leave,” reported Crescentia DeGoede to Unificationnews.com. “Rev. Shota had sent a fax to Steen letting them know we would be there at 1:30 p.m. and that we would like to meet about the billboard, but the lady simply told us that we weren't allowed inside and that there was nobody with whom we could meet today.

The reporter from the *Philadelphia Daily News* that came to the site to interview us shared with me that he got in touch with someone from Steen who said they hadn't known what the billboard was going to look like when they signed the contract. On the other hand, an employee at arrangementfinders.com said that Steen had to approve what was going up.,” Pastor Crescentia DeGoede said.

“Once we were refused entry, we continued to protest outside the building and to interview with the reporters there. Steen's building is located right alongside a highway, and cars would honk at us as we held our signs and stood there, so there weren't any passerby who could really stop by and join us,” she added.



Protesting outside of Steen building

Pastor DeGoede said that the contract for the billboard ends this Friday, February 8, 2013, but that she hopes the statement made today together with the complaints and protests of other Philadelphia community members was enough to discourage Steen to have or renew contracts with agencies like arrangementfinders.com in the future.

“We were heartened to hear that other people had actually called Steen and complained about the billboard,” Pastor DeGoede said. She added: “When Rev. Shota had first called Steen, nobody other than the secretary would talk to him, because they had already received several complaints and didn't want to hear any more. The secretary was pretty dismissive and told Rev. Shota that he just had to bear with it until the contract ended, and that there was no guarantee that Steen wouldn't put up a sign like this again. However, the fact that our local newspapers were interested enough to come, even though we were such a

small gathering of people, was inspiring. Instead of promoting adultery, the media was helping us fight against it. The energy of the people was really strong. Loretta Graham, an activist from the Pennsylvania Family Coalition, recommended to her fellow demonstrators that “We need to do more of this type of thing where we stood in solidarity people of different faiths.”



Protesting outside of Steen building.

“It was really powerful to see these different ministers come out and stand together for a cause and to see the commitment from those gathered to continue to fight this issue, even if Steen didn’t take the sign down,” said Leighton DeGoede, co-pastor of the Philadelphia Unification Church. He continued: “Even though the fact that the billboard went up is a terrible thing, to us it became a great opportunity to unite on a large scale. In that way, we made a difficulty into a victory.”