

STF TESTIMONIES

Jimi Baughman – Current STF Participant

Hi. For those of you who don't know me, my name is Jimi. I'm writing this to you because I want to tell you just a little about my experience on STF (Special Task Force). For those of you who don't know what STF is, it's basically a one to two year program that BC's can join after they've graduated from high school. Basically, you'll get the chance to do some old school MFT (Mobile Fundraising Team...stuff your parents might have done back in their day, going all over the country in a van with a bunch of awesome brothers and sisters and a team captain)-style fundraising and also be involved heavily in major "church" activities (one major thing we were helping out with almost full-time this year was True Father's 50-state "We Will Stand" speaking tour). OK, so I'm guessing that most of you probably aren't so turned on by the prospect of spending most of your days on STF going out on the streets fundraising or witnessing (yeah, it gets REALLY heard sometimes) but how about this: you get to spend at least one year of your life totally devoted to finding out WHO you are, WHY you're who you are, WHERE you are in your relationship with God, and HOW you're going to deepen that already-existing or (in most cases) non-existent relationship with God. For me, this experience on STF (even though it's not even over yet) has been utterly and completely (and I am telling this to you with all sincerity) LIFE-CHANGING.

Up until I went to STF, I thought I knew who I was...of course, I don't think that anyone can ever truly know EXACTLY who they are unless they become perfected, but you know, I thought I knew the basic structure of "me". Actually, more than that, I thought that I knew exactly where I was with God: I knew I loved Him as a father and that I talked to Him a lot, so I thought that basically, we had a very good relationship. However, when you're out there fundraising, you're not just in some place selling a bunch of wind chimes or whatever. You are out there with God, no matter whether you are talking to a million people or not. And spending all that time alone with just Heavenly Father by your side, you come to realize many, many different things. You start to see yourself in different aspects, each level of your self-discovery delving deeper and deeper into your personality, your heart, your soul, and most importantly who you are and why God created you that way. You start to understand things about the puzzles of your past that somehow create the picture of the present and you also wonder differently about what the future holds. Moreover, you come to realize (very, very slowly) that everything you thought was important and real and all the things you thought were "all good" (for example, my relationship with God) are actually not as important or real or not as

everything", I can assure you that I am not joking about this one. No, STF wasn't anywhere near entertaining, but it was unquestionably priceless.

Now I am sorry fI offend anyone through this letter for whatever reason, I do not mean to step on anyone's toes. I know there are people out there who do not see much significance in STF, and there are those who repute it as a life and death issue. What stance do I take? Well from my own personal experience I will have to agree that it was a lift-pending issue. I don't want to get into many personal stories, but I'll just give the brief account of how I joined STF. Upon finishing my senior year I was deciding very casually what to do next in my life. I was planning to go to a university (besides Bridgeport) and knew my faith was rather weak. There were some obvious changes I would enjoy, such as unchallenged freedom, but I also had a daunting fear of myself because I knew I was capable of making serious, irreconcilable mistakes. So I had this inescapable contradiction between one part of me that loved my family and didn't want to hurt anyone, and another part that wanted to "experience life". After much disgruntled complaint I gave in to my conscience and chose to go to STF because I knew from my past that I was beyond just weak in faith; I was completely unreliable to my own self-values. For the rest of eternity I will never regret having made this decision

It isn't possible to sum up the STF experience in writing. It is different than Little Angels School, RYS projects, Camp Sunrise, or PLA. It goes beyond all those because it is about challenge beyond limits, without anywhere to run or to hide. There were some mornings when I woke up thinking to myself that I just could not live on another day. I had nothing: no material security, no ego, no pride, no friends, no wallet, no pets, no comfort, no self-image, and no excuses. It was just Hyun Myung Chin facing the task at hand, and all I could do was to see where God would lead me. Have you ever stood alone by the ocean before an incoming storm? It is the most intimidating ordeal; you begin to feel totally overwhelmed and powerless before nature. Some mornings were just like that. What could I do in those helpless situations except surrender myself to God and trust his love? Are those kinds of experiences important in life? Absolutely, along with many other soul-searching challenges. When I look back at it now, all those difficulties, complaints, tears, sweat, (no blood), were just miracles in my life. Not because they have become fond memories or inspirational moments, but because they blessed me with the most fundamental tools for life. This does not mean that I victoriously overcame everything and achieved a spiritual standard from which I only continue growing exponentially. Not at all. Many of my toughest struggles are happening in my post-STF life, but the point is that now I am equipped with a clear purpose and the truth to help me manifest that goal. Some people find the idea of working for the church to be absurd, but it isn't just about the church, it's about you. That's the essential part that many people miss. I knew I couldn't waste time resenting the fact that I was making money for someone else, or that I was belittling my pride doing something I thought I didn't need to do. The essence was

filled with my ramblings by the end of the trip. After days of making very little (\$100 fI was lucky) I finally reached out to the director back at the CARP Center. I called him up and he reminded me to "live for the sake of others." I've heard this a million times before, but what happened in the next day brought the power of this slogan to life.

I went out on my first two hour run, and zip. I made nothing. I was terribly frustrated. I remember senselessly yelling as I was walking down the sidewalk, my wind chimes clanging against each other. I passed a church and decided to go in. There, once again, I pulled out my trusty journal, but this time my writing helped me; something clicked. I realized that living for others in this context meant fundraising with the purpose of actively giving vitality and joy to people. I was determined to help people, not take their money. This was my attitude and I felt very clearly I would be successful with this mindset.

I went back out and the first door I came to was answered by an old woman. She looked very tired and uninterested in the wind chimes, but said something about needing help with changing a light bulb. This was it!! This was my opportunity. I went inside and found her apartment in shambles. There was cat food and poop all over the kitchen and living room floors. She had about ten video rentals stacked on top of her TV She lived alone and couldn't move so well so she spent most of her day watching TV. After I changed her light bulb, I swept her kitchen, vacuumed her living room and bedroom. As I was finishing, she said, "Just recently I've been renewing my faith in God and here you came like an angel." I was no longer selling a windchime for my youth group; I was a gift from God to this woman.

I left her apartment and continued fundraising. People just couldn't say no to me. Twenty dollars here; another twenty there. Suffice it to say something changed in my attitude and spirit, and this made all the difference with my external result. In the town of Gross Point, Michigan at 3:30 in the morning, I made my \$400 goal.

*Matthew Jones
STF, Class of 1996*