

## President Obama's Aunt Graduates from Unification Theological Seminary

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Friends, family and fellow students enthusiastically applauded as twenty-two students received their diplomas at the 35th commencement ceremony of the Unification Theological Seminary (UTS) at its New York City campus on Thursday, May 19, 2011. The 15 students receiving their Masters in Religious Education included Rev. Margaret Obama from Kaisumu, Kenya, U.S. President Barack Obama's aunt, who wrote her thesis on "Religious Education to Support Orphaned Teen Girls in Kenya: a Curriculum." Rev. Obama has told friends that she will spend the coming year doing pastoral care in service to her local church, the Church of the Incarnation, in Jersey City, New Jersey.



"I learned so many good things at UTS," Rev. Obama told Familyfed.org. "Many churches concentrate on taking care of their own, but the Unification community focuses upon serving those outside their own group," she said. "They [the Unificationists] cherish family values, making husbands, wives and children the priorities, and I believe that by promoting family values, they are building world peace, because peace in the family easily extends to the larger world," she

told familyfed.org in a telephone interview. Rev. Obama says that she became involved with Unificationists after attending seminars of the Women's Federation for World Peace in Kenya in 2005.



Other graduates included Masahiro Izawa and Kyoko Sakai from Japan, Wonhee Lee and Seonghe Park from Korea, and Erick Rodriguez from Columbia. Mr. Izawa, who is the father of three children, wrote his thesis on "The Spiritual Education of Children." Mrs. Sakai wrote her thesis on "Women's Roles as Natural Educators in Their Families."



Mr. Lee wrote his thesis on "Faith Education to Strengthen the Life of Faith in Middle-aged Women in the Unification Church of Japan." Mr. Park wrote his thesis on "Practical Preparation and Education for Successful Married Life of Second Generation Couples." Mr. Rodriguez wrote his thesis on "How to Develop Healthy Self-Perception and Self-Esteem through a Mind-Body Unity Meditation Program for Character Education." Other graduates included: Jennifer Fleischmann, Dale Garrett, Jack Harford, Dale Hoffman, Michel Kahandja Imbongo, Jeongsun Lee, Everton McPherson, Daegil No, and Ilse Sutchar.



Mr. Mabau Ilembila, from the Democratic Republic of Congo, was the sole recipient of the new degree in Master of Arts in Religious Studies. Mr. Ilembilia expressed his desire to start a school and to introduce a new kind of education for future leaders in his home country, which has suffered from political violence.



Mr. Sungmin Choe received the sole Master of Divinity degree. He expressed his strong desire to work for the reunification of North and South Korea, which was also the topic of his research thesis.



Five graduates received the degree of Doctor of Ministry, including: Sunhee Moon Davies, Frank LaGrotteria, Karen Judd-Smith, David Dong Woo Kim, and Kolawole Ogunlola.



Dr. Richard Panzer, UTS President, pointed out that “the turmoil and confusion in many parts of the world, compounded by unethical behavior and misuse of authority by those in power, can only be solved by leaders who possess integrity, who bring out the better instincts of their followers, and who have the ability to work together with people of different faiths for the common good.” He asserted that “developing such leaders was the vision of the Founder of UTS, Rev. Sun Myung Moon, who often urged UTS graduates to take a stand for good, and that when they did so, people of conscience would be attracted to support and work with them.”



Mrs. Heather Thalheimer, director of Education for the Unification Church USA, gave a heartfelt commencement address on behalf of Rev. In Jin Moon, the national pastor of the church. Mrs. Thalheimer spoke movingly about how “changing the world starts with developing a living relationship with God.”



Erick Rodriguez received the award for student service. Margaret Obama received the Outreach award in recognition of her ecumenical efforts.



*Contributed by Dr. Richard Panzer, President the Unification Theological Seminary.*

