

How I Joined in Philadelphia

Randy Phillips
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Phillips signed membership on April 30, 2011 at the Philadelphia Family Church (above).

I was born in 1988 in Philadelphia. My ancestors are African-American, Cherokee Indian and Hispanic. My father passed away when I was only four, and my mother, a registered nurse, found a second husband eight years later. But neither my birth father nor my step father had much role in my upbringing. Growing up I did a lot of the chores to help raise my younger brother and two younger sisters. I did the cleaning, changed diapers and did quite a bit of baby-sitting. I didn't feel sorry for myself. Yet, all the time I felt like I was older than my actual age and people would tell me this, too.

Growing up, I always knew I wanted something more in life. I didn't grow up like many second-generation Unificationist kids, knowing the Divine Principle. Yet, many of my formative experiences prepared me for the church. My mom taught me to be a caring person, and to respect people of other faiths. I always knew I wanted to be a father, wanted be together with a person whom I could love. I was raised Roman Catholic, but I asked a lot of questions about theology, such as why we could believe in a benevolent God in a world in which so many children are suffering



When Randy Phillips (right) met Crescentia DeGoede (left) at Arcadia University's student orientation he became intrigued by her relationship with God and wanted learn more about her faith.

In high school I had high grades, graduating with a GPA of 3.8 at Northeast High School in Philadelphia where I benefited from the health-and science magnet program. Mom helped me a bit in middle school, but in high school I wanted to work on my own and take on the challenges.

I met Crescentia DeGoede (who until recently was a co-pastor of the Philadelphia Church) when we were both students at Arcadia University in Glenside, PA, about 20 minutes drive away from Philadelphia. It was at an orientation meeting I could tell that Crescentia was a young woman of high character. I was intrigued about her relationship with God, and I wanted that, too. I consider myself something of a philosopher – always interested in religious teachings, too.

I could also see that she was a compassionate person, and we struck up a friendship. I remember throwing a wad of paper at the trash can but missed it. I was going to let it go, but she picked it up for me, and I noticed that. Over time, we got to know each other. I became curious to know about her background. In December of 2010 she invited me to visit the Philadelphia Church Center, and she invited

me to young-adult small group events.

Every time I went to Lovin' Life services in New York or a local church service, I loved them. After visiting the church center, I concluded that this is the one religion that embodies God in every way that I had envisaged. So, once I realized these things, it was easy for me to become more involved with the faith.

I became good friends with Mr. Kevin Convery's family in Philadelphia, and I used to join small group meetings in his house where we would discuss poetry and literature. From these meetings I got a good idea of the core values of the church. I signed membership in Philadelphia in April 30, 2011.



DeGoede (left) introduced Phillips before he shared his life of faith testimony as a new Unificationist member with the Philadelphia Family Church congregation.

During most of 2011 and 2012 I wasn't seen at church, as I had to focus on my courses in medical school in Valhala, New York. Those two years were the toughest things I had gone through in my life, but it was spiritually tough, too. In medical school I got hit on a fair number of times by women looking to marry a doctor, but I avoided situations that involved temptation. I didn't have that problem in high school or college because girls seemingly weren't attracted to me. And during med school I knew I wanted to save myself.

Although I rarely went to church, the church was always in the back of my mind. I wanted to stay close to God. So, after I took my first board examination in February 2013, I moved into the Philadelphia church for a month, and during that time I re-read the whole Divine Principle book. It wasn't part of my initial plan, but I just decided to do it, and I'm glad I did. It helped me understand a lot of what had gone on in my life.

When I pray, it is like meditating. By listening to music, I sort out my thoughts and desires. I don't listen to lyrical music anymore, preferring classical. For me, I feel closer to God when I listen to music or when I am working at the clinic. I feel that by doing medical work I am creating a mindset that may help someone now or in the future. Every moment I spend studying now gives me the opportunity to help someone in the future, when the time comes.

My mother knows about my church membership but we haven't had a chance to really discuss it. To her, what really matters is that I believe in God.

Regarding Vision 2020 I am thinking about what I could do to contribute. I know I have a lot to give, but I am not sure yet what that will be. Of course, we believe that we have the keys to salvation, and every other denomination believes it does, too. I have thought about ways to tell other people about the church, but I don't want it to sound like a sales pitch. I want to be more loving, come across as a friend to that person.

It's funny, you can't force a person's faith. It's like how a parent feels toward his child. He just has to be patient.