

## **1,300 Unification Church members gather in Washington DC to support the Nixon**

Neil Salonen

December 15, 1973



*President Richard M. Nixon addresses enthusiastic crowd at annual Christmas tree-lighting ceremony.*

It was December 14, the opening of the official Christmas celebration in the United States capital. But the bright spirit of Christmas was dimmed figuratively by the accusations of the Watergate crisis and literally by the shortage of energy.

With undaunted spirit, about 1300 members and friends of the Unification Church converged on Washington, D. C. from all over the country to demonstrate a spirit of national unity and love, and to make this Christmas truly a time of new hope in America.

Inspired by Rev. Sun Myung Moon and Mr. Bo Hi Pak on December 11, coordinators Neil Salonen, Michael Warder, Sara Sack and others arranged the logistics and program for the eventful day. Housing was provided by the Silver Spring Sheraton Hotel and meeting space by the D. C. Armory.

At 4:45 p.m. an enthusiastic crowd gathered on the Ellipse (south of the White House) for the annual ceremony lighting the National Christmas Tree. For the first time in 50 years a live tree, from the state of Pennsylvania, was planted as a permanent Christmas tree. For the occasion Gil Roschuni designed a triangular red, white, and blue pennant which was distributed to each person at the ceremony.

The pennant bore the slogans: God Loves America, God Loves Nixon, and Support Our President. Special signs and posters called people to Forgive, Love, and Unite. A December 15 *Washington Post* story estimated the crowd at 10,000. The few hecklers in the rear were drowned out by an overwhelmingly positive crowd.

President and Mrs. Nixon were visibly surprised by the warm response of the audience upon their arrival. After the formal tree lighting ceremony ended, Nixon stepped down from the stage to greet well-wishers. David Kim offered the President and his wife pennants, which the police kept them from receiving. The Little Angels, who had made a special trip to greet President Nixon, tried to give him flowers, but the movement of the crowd separated them.

Television programs aired nationwide gave credit to Reverend Moon and the Unification Church. However, their broadcasts ended with the benediction, so the American public missed the moving scenes of Nixon among the people. Many of the crowd streamed from the Ellipse to the front of the White House

to sing and rally on behalf of the President. The police ruled the gathering illegal, however, and forced the orderly demonstrators to leave.

Later in the evening, after Christmas caroling on the stage at the Ellipse, all the Unification Church members and supporters formed a candlelight procession to Lafayette~ Square in front of the White House. There they prayed and sang carols for the President and his family. At 11:30 the group broke up, disappointed in their deep hope that the President would show some response to their love and support.

To everyone's overwhelming surprise, the President suddenly appeared from the White House, and was quickly surrounded by a cheering crowd. Mr. Nixon asked the people if they were cold, since they had been outside most of the day, and he expressed his gratitude for their support. Unification Church President Neil Salonen gave Mr. Nixon a Christmas card and a large orange candle, which he said would burn "for the rest of your administration." Nixon again thanked the young people.

Mr. Salonen explained to President Nixon about the Watergate proclamation by Reverend Moon, which appeared in 21 newspapers around the nation. Mr. Nixon replied that he had noticed it in the newspapers the morning it appeared and was deeply touched. He invited Mr. Salonen to meet him in the White House at 10: 00 the next morning. One secret serviceman who accompanied the President told a bystander that Mr. Nixon had been in bed, but got up to come out to meet the young singers.

The crowd was overjoyed to meet the President and personally show their love and God's love for him. They chanted, "We Love the President" over and over and shook his hands with deep emotion. As he returned to the White House, the young people sang, "God Bless America."

Although Mr. Salonen did not get to meet Mr. Nixon the next morning, he met key aides and gave them a letter asking for an appointment for Reverend Moon with the President on January 6. Later that day, CBS televised nation-wide an interview with Mr. Salonen and photographs of President Nixon greeting Unification Church members.