

Chicago Kodan's Third anniversary of Sunday Hoon Dok Hae

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This year marks the third anniversary of an inspiring Hoon Dok Hae tradition practiced by the Chicago Family Church through community gatherings in each other's homes early every Sunday morning.

"The tradition was inspired by the Chicago Kodan families who have been having Hoon Dok Hae together every day at 5:00am for the last nine years," said Rev. Jesse Avila, coordinator of the program. "Three years ago, Rev. Kazuo Takami, former pastor of the Chicago Family Church, expanded that foundation to adopt Sunday morning as a time for community Hoon Dok Hae to generate a supportive spiritual atmosphere in preparation for Sunday Service."

The Sunday morning gatherings are a wonderful time of celebration for families and friends. In the beginning, the number of participants was small. Now, attendance has expanded to 44 different families representing seven nations, with a continuous increase in the number of hosts. Attendees assemble in the living room of a different host family each week, with the location announced to the community through a weekly e-newsletter.

The programs begin at 6:00am with a symbolic greeting to True Parents, singing the Cheon Il Guk Anthem, reciting the Family Pledge and offering a prayer. The reading proceeds for 30 minutes from text in one of the three Holy Scriptures: the Cheon Seong Gyeong, Pyeong Hwa Gyeong or Cham Bumo Gyeong. Every attendee has the opportunity to read a portion of the text. The host couple then shares their

personal testimony of joining the Unification movement, or how True Parents introduced them to each other, or other aspects of their life of faith. The program ends with a prayer by the local pastors or member of the host family.

“Last year, we started including testimonies in the meetings after the reading,” explains Avila. “Many of us have shed tears of gratitude and tears of hope from realizing that all of us have so much in common. We have faith that God has always been working in our lives, and that, regardless of where our journeys take us, we are eternally connected as true brothers and sisters.”

Breakfast is also a big part of the celebration, served to everyone during a relaxed time of fellowship. The menu is often diverse, representing the many different cultures of the host families.

A further benefit of the Sunday Hoon Dok Hae gatherings is that they provide an important worship opportunity to those who can't attend the Sunday Service due to their work. They also provide a supportive means of reconnecting with families that had drifted away from the church community. Some of the meetings have even been held in homes of Christian families as well as a Buddhist temple, enabling True Parents' teachings to be extended to inter-religious friends.

The main outcome of the Sunday Hoon Dok Hae gatherings is that the participants have grown much closer together through sharing God's Word, gaining insights through the readings and testimonies and deepening their bonds of heart. They intend to keep the tradition going for a long time.

