

Intergenerational Project Phoenix Brings Generations Together in Chicago

Bruce Sutchar
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Project Phoenix, a weekend conference that focuses on intergenerational unity within the Unification movement, came to Chicago in October to help bridge the gap between elder and younger Unificationists.

At a strategic planning retreat in 2015, the Project Phoenix staff decided to hold regional events that would focus on Unification communities. Since then, Project Phoenix has held conferences in Las Vegas, New York, Maryland, New Jersey, San Francisco, and most recently, Chicago. In all of their events, Project Phoenix has been able to have an equal representation of young and old Unificationists, receiving inspiration, tools, and support to further unify the two groups, and creating new possibilities for community growth.

“Although our children were becoming highly successful in their careers, many of us [Unificationist parents] felt that if they did not connect with True Father’s vision and ideals, our movement would dwindle,” said Bruce Sutchar. “Even worse, there was the possibility that America would fail to reap the benefits of True Parents’ teachings.”



The latest Project Phoenix took place at the Learning Center in Elk Grove Village in the greater Chicago area. On the beautiful, sunny weekend of October 6 – 8, 60 young and elder Unificationists came from

Wisconsin, Michigan, Iowa, Washington and, of course, Illinois to participate in the final Project Phoenix event for 2017.

David Young's presentation on Friday evening was an exceptionally clear explanation of how withholding our feelings and withdrawing from sharing with one another causes our relationships to suffer. It causes good people to project the bad feelings we have onto others, to begin criticizing one another, thereby creating a toxic atmosphere. "This problem cannot be analyzed and solved in our minds," explained David. "We can only do so by connecting in heart."



This set the stage for a moving Saturday morning, which included an "Honoring the Generations" intergenerational sharing and "Through our Lens" testimonies. Two Unificationists of the Chicago community shared heartfelt testimonies in the Through Our Lens portion of the program. Kyoko Rinkema spoke about the challenges that she faced in leaving her homeland of Japan, first going to Europe and later coming to America to travel, and finally settling in Chicago to create a family. Sancha Ogden shared about the pressure she felt growing up, partly from societal expectations but also from her own determination to live a life that matters. There were few dry eyes as she tearfully shared her experiences and hopes and dreams.



Mark Anderson shared about the challenges of being a parent when your children struggle and the importance of practicing unconditional love. We were also delighted to hear from Kieran Calavan who recently connected to Project Phoenix in our Bay Area event in July and joined the staff in helping organize the event in Chicago. Kieran expressed the challenges his family went through caring for his sister, who is a triplet along with him and his brother. Her special needs helped to rally his family closer together.



The program again implemented the Community Weaving exercise from the Project Phoenix event in the Bay Area. The Chicago community seemed really energized by the sharing and, as before, many were amazed that simply sharing personal needs with a few, randomly-chosen people can lead to surprising results. It showed that when we are willing to share our needs with our community, we can not only find ways to meet our needs, but also to grow the bonds of community.



On the last day, the Unificationists gathered to discuss next steps in order to improve the program. After surveying the group, community needs were identified by the local group and we broke into three groups to discuss next steps to address those needs. This was the final Project Phoenix event for this year. As planned, Project Phoenix was able to hold conferences in three communities: Maryland, the Bay Area, and now in Chicago. The next step for Project Phoenix is a year-end retreat where we will evaluate this year and plan for 2018.



Project Phoenix

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a space for authentic
relationships.

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Purpose

The purpose of Project Phoenix is to have a place where the older and younger generations can truly connect and learn from one another.

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Our Events

Project Phoenix events are the place where the generations connect, share their stories, their hopes and dreams, and challenges within a safe, embracing atmosphere.

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Projects

Project Phoenix projects are the natural expression of finding people with common interests and ideas and working together to create opportunities to serve the community.

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Our Vision

What kind of community would you like to live in? Prosperous and successful. Yes, but everybody wants that. What about life-

affirming, supportive, optimistic about the future, a place for families to flourish and nurture each other. Is such a thing really possible? How could we create that? How can we actually create a space that allows us to make such dreams into realities?

Cheon Il Guk means two becomes one. It's the place where people can share openly and honestly; where we can all experience not only being listened to, but being heard. It is, simply, the place that we cross the barriers between us and the spirit and love of God rushes in.



Contribute

We are a group of passionate volunteers. Your contribution can help keep Project Phoenix alive.

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