

FFWPU USA: Pastors Anton and Miri Freidman (Scherbl) Help Arkansas Thrive

Naokimi Ushiroda
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"We came to Arkansas just a year ago, and the pandemic kind of squashed the community," said Pastor Miri. "So we were starting from almost zero. But we've since connected with really good people and we have had a lot of fun in the community."

For Unificationist Pastors Anton and Miri Freidman (Scherbl), who became state leaders of Arkansas in March 2021, their new community was hit hard by the Covid-19 pandemic which put a halt to many in-person activities. However, as restrictions eased, the Freidmans got to work.

"We started approaching our youth," said Pastor Miri in a report shared with FFWPU USA leaders on June 28. "We have a dozen young people who weren't that involved in the community." But the pastor couple quickly got creative in connecting with the youth through activities they enjoy, including establishing a recurring board game night on Fridays.

"They like board games," said Pastor Miri, "so while we were losing [the games], we were also learning all these new games that they would bring. We were speaking their language [by engaging their interests]. From there, service projects soon began.

"We started to do service work by helping to renovate a community member's house," recalled Pastor Miri. "She had a room that was growing black mold, so we started cleaning and removing it before repainting the area together. We were very active and doing the job thoroughly, and we could see the big heart that our young people have in doing this service work."

The pastors said such activities cultivated a culture of *hyojeong* among the community. "Even though Arkansas is one of our smaller communities, I'm really inspired by how active they are," said Izak Hernandez, the secretary general of FFWPU USA South. "I'm moved especially with how much [the pastors] connect with their members and their young people."

In June, the Scherbls organized canoeing and kayaking on Lake Catherine for Father's Day, one of five lakes in the pristine Ouachita Mountain region. "Arkansas has beautiful land with a lot of lakes and trees," said Pastor Miri. "We've gone on a picnic and gone boating together and had a lot of fun."

The youth are also now supportive of meeting more people in the greater community, including one couple who attended the local ACLC anniversary celebration and began the 40-day separation process. "We're like a big team taking care of this couple," said Pastor Miri. She encouraged elders to connect with their local youth in ways that are meaningful to them. "There is that connection from True Parents," she said, "so we have this foundation to work from already."

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NORTHEAST@FAMILYFED.ORG

Naokimi Ushiroda *National
President, USA; Northeast
Subregional Director*

Resfred Arthur *Secretary
General, Northeast*

SOUTHEAST COMMUNITY

SOUTHEAST@FAMILYFED.ORG

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