

## FFWPU USA: Young Unificationists Connect at 24+ Connect Singles Retreat

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*Photo courtesy of Tasnah Bercy*

Young Unificationists recently came together for the first [24+ Connect](#) singles retreat held in person since 2019. After being conducted online for two years due to the pandemic, the 24+ retreat gathered participants ages 24-39 from all over the US and Europe for an extended weekend at Camp Kulaqua in High Springs, FL.

Participants rallied together through the unfortunate flight-cancellation nightmare of Hurricane Nicole to make it to the retreat. Almost all flights had been canceled, with many participants needing to reroute their flights to Atlanta and other airports. But the participants and staff worked together to organize carpooling, with some participants even going out of their way to pick other people up. In the end, 78 of the 81 participants registered made it to the retreat.



*Photo courtesy of Tasnah Bercy*

The retreat was run by five couples: Shiz and Ben Pehling, Tasnah and Lukas Bercy, Yoshie and Matt

Breland, Sungmi and Kristian Holdhus, and Mickey La Hogue. With five of these couples' kids in tow, there was an added spirit of family to the retreat that provided a sense of vision of what's possible for participants in their future.

"I appreciated all the young families who came," said one participant. "It's so much more pleasant with young kids around, and the examples our young couples set was really comforting and encouraging."



*Photo courtesy of Tasnah Bercy*

Of the nine individuals on the staff team, three had previously participated in 24+ retreats as singles. The staff testimonies shared throughout the retreat helped many participants find clarity and understanding on how to move forward in the matching and Blessing.

"I never thought it was possible anymore for me because I lacked self pride and had shame," said another participant. "Hearing other testimonies really helped me. I had preconceptions about a lot of people here but those concepts were crushed. I love every single person here."



*24+ Staff Photo courtesy of Tasnah Bercy*

The demographic of participants and their reasons for attending was varied, with some attending a 24+ retreat for the first time or just starting their relationship journey, while others came from past relationships or Blessings and were finding hope in their journeys. Several participants also came with the intention of reconnecting to our faith community and others jumped at the opportunity to connect with peers sharing a common vision. For the first time, this 24+ retreat had a waitlist of brothers wanting to attend as opposed to a waitlist of sisters.



*Photo courtesy of Shizuka Pehling*

In addition to staff testimonies each morning, participants discussed topics such as openness and intentionality; relationships with God, myself, and others; challenging limiting beliefs, concepts, and blocks; what really matters in a relationship; and how to work toward your vision. The afternoons were filled with free time and a variety of activities for participants to bond and connect, including a Tower of Faith (zip line, climbing wall, and leap of faith), canoeing, putt putt, disc golf, swimming in a spring, sip and paint, mochi making, and more.

Evenings activities consisted of age-based discussions, board games, and a campfire with smores. One activity that was a highlight for several participants were the one-on-ones, which provided the opportunity for each participant to individually talk to the participants of the opposite gender for a few minutes.

"I loved that we were encouraged to utilize the time well to ask direct questions, be bold, and feel trusted to communicate with someone of the opposite gender with a lifelong future in mind," said a participant.

Overall, participants walked away with clearer understanding on what they may be looking for in a spouse, in where they are in their relationships with God and others, and with practical steps on how they can individually prepare for the matching and Blessing.

"As a movement," one participant shared, "normalizing healthy brother-sister relationships like what I witnessed here is so important, especially if we want to smoothen the process for candidates to go from a single working on themselves to a single looking for a life partner."

24+ hosts semi-annual retreats to provide the opportunity and resources for the greater 24+ Unificationist singles population to enrich their connections and relationships. The hope is to empower individuals on their journey to seek the Blessing of True Parents through virtual and in-person retreats by getting more clear about where they are with their current relationships and beliefs about their future, feeling connected to other participants and staff in supportive ways, are able to move past blocks that have been holding them back in a relationship, and can feel ready to take action towards creating the relationship they want

You can learn more about 24+ Connect and hear more testimonies [here](#).