

## FFWPU USA: The Marriage Blessing: One Big (Messy) Family

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*Photo Credit: Fukuya Sano*

We're known for our "mass weddings" (a.k.a. the Marriage Blessing Ceremony, or as we affectionately call it, "The Blessing"). What I find the most special about the Blessing is how it impacts our community.

One of the best things about growing up in the Unificationist movement has been the community. No matter where you go, you can always find people who feel like family, even if you've never met them before.



*Jennifer Pierce*

### **That kind of universal bond makes our community a safe space.**

I believe this comes from our Blessing culture. The fundamental belief about the Blessing is that God is invited into your marriage and future family. This naturally extends to all families under that umbrella. When you receive the Marriage Blessing, you become part of the Unificationist family.

I grew up with a group of second-generation Unificationists. Because my parents knew their parents, we got to spend a lot of time together. Our families trusted each other.

### **There's an inherent trust.**

Even now when I travel, I often find other Unificationists to stay with and they warmly welcome me. A bond of family that isn't blood. Not to say this is necessarily unique to us, but it is an unforeseen benefit to having a tight knit network.

In 2016, I joined a retreat in Korea for young Unificationists. I staffed the high schoolers. I met a woman whom I had known tangentially because she was also from the West Coast, but not very well. We ended up talking deeply about our faith journeys and what we wanted to do with our lives.

A few years later, I went to visit her city for work and ended up staying at her house. She told me that it was so weird how easily we connect every time we meet up. Like we've known each other for years. I agreed. It's like we were sisters. I went to her Blessing Ceremony in 2020 and her wedding last year.



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### **Our faith makes us feel like family.**

This kind of experience is not unusual. While we may not always become bosom buddies with every Unificationist, the groundwork is already there. Our faith makes us feel like family, and, yeah, we're not going to like every family member, but when you do, it's deep.

I do not think our community is perfect. There is a lot of strife between younger Unificationists (including myself) and our elders, particularly when it comes to broader culture. How do we fit in? How can we contribute? Does it align with our values? We've at least come to a place where we can reevaluate some of that.

There's also a lot of individual pain. Families are messy, even in our Unificationist bubble, and some of it feels insurmountable.

### **I still believe in the value of the Blessing.**

But even with all of that, I still believe in the value of the Blessing and what it provides to our community. It continues to be a safe space, and I think we're evolving to understand more and more what that means and how we can make a culture that puts God's love at the center of it all.

I absolutely think we can do better to be more embracing and showcase a culture that uplifts and nurtures all of us. I think it starts with understanding God as our Heavenly Parent.

The next Blessing is coming up in about a week, and many of my friends are going this year (as they have been every year for the past four years). I'm excited to see what kind of future this new group of couples is going to create. I think it's going to be better.