

## **Spreading True Parents Word through Soccer in Ohio**

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A friendly game of soccer at a public park soon turned into an outreach tool for Columbus Unificationists. It began two years ago when a few local Unificationists began playing soccer together for fun and exercise. They soon realized it was a great way to meet new people, as complete strangers often approached them wanting to play. Rev. Frank Sanchez then decided that soccer could be used as a purposeful outreach tool.

The goal initially was to unite people of all ages and backgrounds, and to provide a space for people to connect to the community especially if they are not able to come to Sunday services. In the long term, they hope to create a fully organized team capable of entering leagues and competitions.

So far the UC Columbus team consists of 18 committed players with uniforms, and about six people who join in practices and scrimmages, a total of roughly 24 participants. Players are young and elder Unificationists, as well as non-Unificationists. In the near future 30+ committed participants will make it possible to split up into two teams, with one for children aged 12-17 and one for adults ages 18 and up.

The soccer team has initiated gatherings off the field as well. Once a year around springtime, UC Columbus Soccer hosts a potluck barbecue for players and their families and friends. Families prepare food as the team plays a scrimmage game. After soccer, everyone gathers to enjoy the food and company. This year's cookout took place in June with beautiful weather and great attendance.

The team continues to face the obstacles of entering a league and hopes that they can eventually host a tournament. Despite the difficulties, the soccer team has been a source of tremendous joy and fellowship. The team has participated in scrimmages against other local teams, and have had guest

players from other teams join them for scrimmages. The program continues to grow in interest and participation, and organizers say it's only a matter of time before the program expands again. As one local participant said, "We believe that we have the potential of developing this program and reaching out to many people with the message of our True Parents"

