

Welcome back, Bromley boys!

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August 12, 2011



This year's STF programme concluded last Sunday. Four members of the Bromley community returned this week – Colin B., Joshua Browning, Matthew Miller & Sung Joo Song – and although it was announced at short notice, I wanted to give them an opportunity to share their testimonies this week while their experiences are still fresh in their memories. So last night I offered to prepare a meal for the lads and their families, after which the rest of the community was invited to come and listen to their stories.

It was good to see these four young men are still the same people they were a year ago just before they disappeared to dedicate a year of their lives towards public mission – they're the same *Bromley boys* who were fondly cherished by the community as they grew up through their adolescence. But it was also good to see that some things had changed:



The lads always had a bromantic affection towards each other, but somehow their emotional bonds possessed a deeper dimension now. Sung Joo had shared how after the first couple of weeks of the kick-off workshop, his friends became his family members, coming with all the struggles and challenges that family members offer! Passing through soul-searching challenges, the brothers shared numerous stories of how they overcame interpersonal conflict and forged deep fellowship with the very people they initially struggled with.

Each of the lads also demonstrated that they had been through an incredible journey of faith, asking difficult questions, not always receiving answers, but somehow understanding better who they are, understanding better who their parents are, understanding better who True Parents are. Indeed, there was a great appreciation for the 1st generation, with the young men showing some understanding of what their parents and elders had gone through in the past. Somehow the thing that the lads testified to most of all last night was the power of STF to help young men and women discover or redefine their faith, taking them out of their usual comfort zones in an environment of care, education and love.

What impressed me most of all was how brutally honest the lads were. Their stories were not rose-tinted nor were they littered with clichéd euphemisms. (Except for the phrase “Caining-out”, of which Josh expressed disapproval!) It is unusual in contemporary society for young men in their late teens or early twenties to share their hearts so eloquently and openly in front of a mixed audience. Yet the brothers did that last night without coercion. Furthermore, they spoke off the cuff, without having prepared what they wanted to say, and yet what they shared was meaningful, insightful and inspiring.

After the four brothers had shared their stories, they accepted some questions from the audience, but I was impressed that Matty replied with a question of his own, asking what expectations the community has of the brothers upon their return. Personally, I'm just excited by the potential that these brothers possess to make an impact for God & True Parents in London and the UK, and I'm looking forward to working out with them how they plan to creatively assert themselves in this new chapter of their lives.



Colin will be doing a 2nd year of STF, hoping to help his younger brothers and sisters experience some of the things he could experience this year



Josh had started the year on DONE, but upon graduating in January he joined STF; this year he visited 14 countries!



At the end of the ODP+ workshop last year, Matty was convinced he didn't need to do STF, but somehow he changed his mind, and although it was a year of ups and downs, the experiences have galvanised his faith



Sung Joo realised after looking in the proverbial mirror that he needed to work on himself this year, and through his testimony I got the impression God was giving him the experiences he needed to help him grow