

Unificationists Launch New Era of Self-Governance

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“It ain’t over till it’s over,” Yogi Berra has been quoted as saying, and the election results are still being processed, but for the first time in its history, the Unification Church has voted for District Council representatives who will soon elect their District Pastors and play a key role in establishing congregational governance in most states.

According to the direction of Rev. Hyung Jin Moon, the new president of the Unification Church USA, the elections for the interim eight-person District Councils should have been completed by Oct. 23, 2012.

After listening to the members all across the country on his Town Hall Meeting Tour, Rev. Moon made a commitment to establish an election-based system.

The interim election of representatives for a District Council in each of the 12 Districts of the USA was an initial and foundational commitment in this direction. “Results of the top 20 nominees for a District Council in each District should be released within 24 hours,” said Dr. Michael Balcomb, Unification Church vice president. “Of these 20 nominees, the top eight nominees with the highest number of votes will be notified of their selection.”

Process of and Criteria for Interim District Council Election

The district-by-district election that ended Saturday Oct. 20, 2012 will decide the members of the District Councils. According to a memo sent out October 12, 2012 titled “Letter to All Members – New Era of Freedom and Responsibility” from Rev. Hyung Jin Moon, “the Unification Church will become a more decentralized organization, with considerable local autonomy being granted to local pastors and Blessed Central Families. Local church governance will be based on a written governance structure which will feature election of local church leaders by tithing members. The leadership at the District Level will be decided by District councils which will be created to oversee the Districts.”

The elections were called quickly after the town hall tour ended and without a nominating process, which confused some would-be voters. “There were multiple reasons for no nominations, and one of these was that Hyung Jin Moon wanted all members to be considered as candidates, including some who might not have nominated themselves or who thought they were not even eligible but who nonetheless carried superb reputations in their communities,” Dr. Anthony Guerra, special assistant to the President, tells Unificationnews.com. He explained that the elections were called quickly to build upon the momentum of the town hall tour.

Several criteria were in place for voters of this election.

Only tithing members were eligible to vote.

The definition of a tithing member was left up to the discretion of the District Pastors.

Each voting member could vote up to four district members to join the District Council, excluding the current District Pastor.

In the order of those receiving the most votes, candidates will be contacted and asked if they are willing to serve on the District Council until the eight positions are filled.

In the event of a tie, the council member will be selected by lottery.

All council members must be willing to invest time and energy in the council and to attend monthly council meetings.

The following are the next steps to be taken after the selection of the eight members of each District Council is selected.

The first District Council meeting will be held within the next couple of weeks. District Council will select either one of its own members or any other member of the community in good standing to serve as the District Pastor.

The Council’s decision will be made by a simple majority vote, but it should seek a consensus.

The President of the Unification Church, America will make the final approval and blessing of the nominated District Pastor.

The District Council will choose one representative by November 21st, either one of its own members or someone else from the district, excluding the District Pastor, to serve on the newly created National Council.

This person will be asked to invest time and effort in developing plans for the National Office, specifically representing the concerns of the District. Travel to meetings in New York will be required, as well as investment of time on various subcommittees.

As an ongoing responsibility, the District Council will approve the annual district budget and key personnel appointments in the district. The Council is responsible for establishing local churches, departments or local councils within the district. The District Council should work closely to advise and support the District Pastor. Council responsibilities will further be detailed by the National Council in the near future.

This first provisional election did not involve any “campaigning” nor solicitation of votes by prospective candidates. This rule may change in the future when the process is reviewed by the National Council.

The elections were administered by U.S. National HQ of the church. The HQ team created the National Voting website for members to cast their votes and compiled the voting results, which were tabulated by the District Offices.

Estimated Results of the Election

Based on an unofficial chart, 3,001 voters in 12 Districts cast their votes. The following results are subject to change after the final tallies are posted, which is expected by Thursday, Oct. 25, 2012.

District	Valid Votes	Valid Voters
District 1 - VA, MD, DC	1,152	292
District 2 - NY	1,178	304
District 3 - NJ, DE, PA	1,709	440
District 4 - MA, VT, NH, RI, ME, CT	1,072	275
District 5 - GA, FL, AL, LA, MS, SC	805	209
District 6 - OH, NC, WV, IN, KY, TN	973	273
District 7 - IL, MI, WI	639	170
District 8 - MN, IA, MO, ND, SD, NE, KS	515	131
District 9 - AR, CO, NM, OK, TX, UT, WY	802	206
District 10 - WA, OR, MT, ID, AK	829	210
District 11 - No. CA, No. NV	910	231
District 12 - So. CA, So. NV, AZ, HI	940	260
Total	11,524	3,001

Reformation of Church Structure based on Divine Principle

“The inspiration and determination for the restructuring of the Church that would allow for more input at every level from the wider membership was really solidified in the President's mind at the end of the Town Hall Meetings tour,” explained Dr. Guerra. “The President recognized that True Parents have raised the American members over the last 35 years and that we have an incredibly talented, mature membership here and the President wanted to unleash that spiritual force based on the give and take actions we received on the tour.”

In regards to the swiftly executed election process, Dr. Guerra said, “the initial process was purposefully done in a quick manner in order to begin the necessary reformation. Furthermore, the system we’ve created is grounded in the Divine Principle. We are embarking on an entire restructuring of the movement so now we have a vertical axis representative of True parents, True Mother, and Rev. Hyung Jin Moon, who was appointed by True Mother, and we also now have a horizontal structure of councils electing pastors at a district level and at a national councils constituted by representatives of each region giving feedback to HQ directly.”

District pastors responding to queries from Unificationnews.com say they have had to battle confusion and logistical problems but that the response to the call for elections has been warmly received by most members. Rev. Richard Buessing, the district pastor of the New England region managed to get one of the highest percentages of member participation, at about 60 percent. “Overall, I think people were surprised by the sudden idea of an election,” he said. “It is something that is very foreign in our church. It has never been done before. One comment I got back from a first gen member who has been here for many years

who said 'I am not an American citizen so I can't vote.' I replied: 'You don't have to be a citizen to vote in our church.' This member mistook the email for the Presidential election."

Rev. Buessing says further: "It took some time to gather a list of eligible voters in some areas. In Massachusetts I had a small team of three people on the revenue committee that we established three years ago to go over the tithing records with me. Other states, I left it to the local leadership to decide based on their own records. They had guidelines from HQ's, and I concurred with them. For second-generation Unificationists who were over 18 and spent all their time on GPA or in college since turning 18, we were lenient. For college graduates in the work force and making money we followed the same pattern as for the first-generation Unificationists who had more of a history of tithing."

Rev. Kevin Thompson, pastor of the region anchored by the Bay Area Church in San Leandro, California writes: "There has been tremendous interest in the elections of District Council with much discussion generated. After the Town Hall meetings I had the sense that people were taking a view that they liked what Hyung Jin Moon had to say, but we're waiting to see what he does before making final assessment of whether they liked what was happening. The speed at which the elections came about meant that there was some confusion in the process with a couple of changes in how, where and who could be voted for but it seemed that most people were happy that this was happening. Determining who was eligible to vote was a challenge. The overall direction was to be liberal and look to include as many people as possible rather than look to exclude people. It certainly wasn't a flawless process and things will surely improve in the future, but I believe that Hyung Jin Moon has shown us clearly that his intention is to make a church with local authority, transparency and participation by as many family members as possible."

"I'm honored to help with the new District Council," said Jim Boothby of Edgewater, Maryland, who got the call from a HQ staffer around noon on Wednesday advising that he had been elected to serve on the District One Interim Council. "It's a great opportunity to usher in long needed change. Clearly our new president realizes the time is here for a more bottom up, local member-oriented emphasis. As a movement we have a huge potential that's unrealized. For example, in Region 1 we have by some estimates more than a hundred former state leaders, national messiahs and seminarians. Are we utilizing them well? I'm not at all sure we've created the environment to fully leverage all that talent," he said.

Boothby added, "I suspect we can do better- much better. We have to. After all, Heavenly God Himself is on our side Father is with us. Why shouldn't we be able to do better? True Mother has already cast a simple, clear vision that from top to bottom we should embrace. It's a vision of renewed of love, growth, evangelism, spirit and determination. I love it."