

## **New Hope Family Church Engages Wedding Center for Interfaith Holy Marriage Blessing 2015**

Douglas Burton  
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The New Hope Family Church has contracted with the Fontaine Bleue Conference Center in Lanham, Maryland to host the local 2015 Holy Marriage Blessing Ceremony, according to Pastor Miilhan Stephens, now the Vice President of FFWPU USA, and the local New Hope Family Church Blessing team.

The wedding center in Lanham expects approximately 150 celebrants, but the space reservation could be expanded to host many more. The Marriage Blessing will be held on March 2, 2015 and will coincide with a live transmission of the main ceremony in Gapyeong, Korea. The wedding at the Fontaine Bleue will feature a banquet, dancing and live entertainment with media invited to record the proceedings. Professional photographers will be on hand.

A unique aspect of the Marriage Blessing in Maryland is that it will host an Interfaith Blessing as well. Previously married couples will be welcome to re-dedicate their marital vows alongside newlyweds. Couples outside the Unificationist community will be welcomed to participate after passing through a standard course of pre-marriage education. Rev. Dr. Vandy Kennedy, pastor of the Walker Mill Baptist Church in Prince George's County has agreed to officiate and will sign marriage licenses at the event. All couples, from any faith, will celebrate the 2015 Holy Marriage Blessing Ceremony at the banquet following the blessing ceremony. Rev. Kennedy said on Dec. 22, 2014 that he will make an effort to form an Interfaith Marriage Coalition that could serve as the umbrella group for all participants. As envisioned by the pastor team and council of the New Hope Family Church, the Marriage Blessing will be both a sacred ceremony for Unificationists and a wedding for believers of any background, including Christians, Muslims, Buddhists and Jews, who believe in the vows expressed by the Unification tradition and faith.

"I can see the value in this vision," said Rev. Randy Francis, a leader of the American Clergy Leadership Conference in Baltimore. He added: "Here in the Baltimore and Washington, D.C. metro area, we have the unique opportunity to bring real hope and change to people of all races, ages and nationalities. God is suffering the pain in our families and communities. Through the joy of both newly wed's vows and marriage re-dedications, a true model of Blessed Families will bloom into a cornerstone of peace and justice for all."