

GPA Team Arrives in Capital for RYS Project

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This week, a group of Generation Peace Academy (GPA) participants arrived in Washington, D.C., to take part in a service project organized by the Religious Youth Service (RYS). This is a testimony from one of the GPA participants about the first two days of the group's visit.

May 22

Our day started at 5:30 a.m. on a chilly, foggy morning in front of the Unification Theological Seminary (UTS) in Barrytown, New York. Our tired but anxious Religious Youth Service (RYS) group loaded up and quickly embarked on a seven-hour drive to our nation's capital, Washington, D.C.

Upon our arrival, we were warmly greeted by Mrs. Tomiko Duggan, the executive director of the office of public affairs of Universal Peace Federation-USA. To start our first adventures in D.C., we headed down historic 16th Street NW, "the Prime Meridian," or the spine of D.C., as Uncle Matt [Mr. Steven Matthew Goldberg, a professional tour guide] described it.



Our first stop was the Washington Monument, where Uncle Matt related some anecdotes about the monument's history. We enjoyed the scenery a little longer, then headed off to our second destination, the National World War II Memorial, on which are engraved the words "Here we mark the price of freedom." There are 4,048 stars, each representing 100 members of the U.S. military who lost their lives in the war.



From there, we took a short walk to the Korean War Veterans Memorial, where nineteen 7-foot statues stand in front of a granite wall displaying the faces of both Korean and American soldiers. When the 19 soldiers are reflected on the granite wall, there appear to be 38 soldiers in total. The 38 soldiers represent the dividing line between North and South Korea, the 38th parallel. There were many kinds of people walking around the memorial, but one group of Korean tourists caught our attention as they offered two bows, apparently to show their gratitude and respect for the Korean and American lives lost for the sake of saving South Korea.





Then we headed to the Lincoln Memorial, where we received a short history lesson as Uncle Matt explained to us about President Abraham Lincoln and the Civil War. We walked up the stairs to find ourselves standing on the very spot where Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. gave his historic “I Have a Dream” speech 54 years ago.



It was a humbling experience, being surrounded by all the different monuments honoring individuals who gave their lives to preserve our freedom and the glory of this nation centered on God. After a an eventful afternoon, we traveled back to the D.C. Family Church, where we ended the night with a nice dinner and an orientation given by Mrs. Tomiko Duggan and the pastors of the church. Today's experience gave us a deeper understanding of the principles that our nation was founded upon and the heart of the American people as they "fought to liberate, not to conquer."



May 23

Today was the first official day of our RYS adventure in Washington, D.C., and we started it with a World Religions Day! Our eventful day started with a short drive to the headquarters of The Washington Times, a newspaper founded by True Parents in 1982. Upon our arrival, we were led upstairs to the Founder's Room on the third floor, where we were greeted by Rev. Gregg Jones and Mrs. Tomiko Duggan, as well as religious leaders of a number of different faiths. The event started with an Interfaith Candle Lighting Ceremony, during which the words and scriptures of past leaders, both religious and

non-religious, were displayed with the help of the participants. The ceremony concluded when all 18 candles had been lit.



The first religious leader who spoke was Rabbi Mark Raphael, who explained that Judaism is not only a religion but also a way of life. Then Dr. Handy Inthisan, representing Buddhism, said that in Buddhist teaching, happiness can be achieved by “getting rid of worry, attachment, and anxiety.” He explained that Buddhism is a religion of peace, in which people eliminate suffering through meditation and finding inner tranquility.

Next up was Catholicism, represented by Father Emmanuel Effah. Soon after came the Islamic faith, represented by Dr. Mimi Hassanein. She spoke of Islam as a religion harmonizing the mind, body, and spirit.



Finally, Rev. Henri Schauffler spoke of the culture and beliefs of Unificationism, whose core belief or goal is the creation of “One family under God” and a world filled with loving and lasting relationships.

Our event at The Washington Times concluded with an inspiring talk given by Sister Jenna, an award-winning spiritual mentor and radio host, who conveyed the importance of cultivating ourselves as leaders of the future and the past and centering the decisions we make on the intention to “benefit all, and not just some.”



We spent the next few hours of our afternoon visiting the houses of worship of Judaism and Islam. First we were given a tour of the Washington Hebrew Congregation, where Rabbi Joseph Skloot showed us a hand-written Torah scroll and talked about the history and different traditions of Judaism. Then we visited an Islamic mosque, where we witnessed firsthand Islamic traditions and practices such as bowing and prayer.



After a jam-packed day, filled with many different cultures and religions, we arrived back at the D.C. Family Church. There Dan and Susan Fefferman, longtime American members and an 1,800 Couple, gave their testimonies, recalling their journey of discovering their faith but, more than that, expressing their love for True Parents through music.

Today was a special day in which we experienced firsthand the beauty and uniqueness of each religion and understood that we are all striving to create a world of peace.

