

Young Unificationists Give Back Through Overseas Service Projects

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This Thanksgiving, 48 second-generation Unificationists are giving back through Lovin' Life Ministries' premier character-education project, Generation Peace Academy (GPA) by doing public service work overseas. Last week, 16 participants departed for Georgetown, Guyana, 15 for Anse La Raye, St. Lucia, and 17 for Port-of-Spain, Trinidad. Each of the young Unificationists traveled on his or her own dime and will spend 21 days in the foreign countries to educate children, care for the elderly and renovate community centers.



California resident Ami Stair, currently in St. Lucia.

California resident Ami Stair, who is serving in the small fishing village of Anse La Raye, St. Lucia, is an aspiring broadcast journalist who plans to study at San Francisco State University after a year of service with GPA. She attended Arroyo High School and was in the top 12 percent of her graduating class of 2011, taking as many honor and AP classes as she could while running cross country and swimming on her varsity swim team.

“Growing up, I would see the quote from Gandhi, ‘Become the change that we want to see in the world’ on a poster in one of my classes,” said Stair. “I remember looking at the poster every day and thinking, ‘How can I be that change?’ I know that by going to St. Lucia, I am making a change. With this attitude, I hope to inspire other youths to get out there and do the same.” Stair’s brother, Christopher, participated in GPA as well and served in Guatemala in 2009.

Kengo Inoue, an Ohio resident who is accompanying Stair, said, “After graduating from Hilliard’s Darby High School in 2010, I was struggling to find a purpose in his life. I then joined Generation Peace Academy and through studying the core Unification values taught by Rev. Sun Myung Moon and by learning from service works, I was able to find a richer purpose in my life. I now want to find my unique way to make the world a better place. I believe that God blessed the American people so that they could go out and serve the world. That is why I am going to St. Lucia. I want to see peace on earth, but I know that peace begins with me.”



Maryland resident James Abendroth, currently in Port-of-Spain, Trinidad.

James Abendroth, a resident of Maryland, is spending his Thanksgiving renovating a community center for youth in Port-of-Spain, Trinidad. Abendroth graduated from the elite science and technology program at Eleanor Roosevelt High School in 2010 and is now a student at the University of Maryland. He earned boy scouting’s highest rank of Eagle and has been active as part of the youth ministry of Lovin’ Life Ministries in Maryland. “I’ve spent so many years focusing on my own life and insuring my own wellbeing,” he said, “so now it’s time to do my part to give back to the world. As Rev. Sun Myung Moon said, ‘Your concern should be how to give and how to give well. As for return to you, trust God. He will take care of the rest.’”



California resident Nadia Schwyter, currently in Port-of-Spain, Trinidad.

Also working in Port-of-Spain is California resident Nadia Schwyter, who plans to study media and journalism after a year of service with GPA. “I have always looked up to my parents,” she said. “They motivated me to have a driven attitude through high-school.” Recognized as an honor student and a scholar-athlete by participating in soccer and track at Arroyo High School, Schwyter credits her local church and school community for encouraging her to attempt “citizen-to-citizen diplomacy.” She said she aims “not only to serve the community of the Island of Trinidad, but also to broaden my awareness of the world. I am so privileged to discover more about a new country.”

Washington resident Nicholas Kiefer is another GPA student currently in Port-of-Spain. Kiefer says he will give back to the people there by “painting murals, creating a garden, working with the Ministry of Community Development, and refurbishing the Red Hill Community Center by repairing roofs, ceilings, walls, electrical and water systems, and installing solar and wind energy systems.”

Mr. Kiefer’s parents, Paul Kiefer and Fumiko Kiefer, said that dedicating a year to service work was a decision that Kiefer chose to make on his own, but that they also have encouraged him to take this year not only to live for the sake of others, but also to become stronger in his own faith in God. Kiefer graduated in the top 10 percent of his high-school class of 2009 and takes part in extracurricular programs such as martial arts with the North American ChunJiDo Association. He has been practicing martial arts for almost nine years and owns a YouTube channel through which he creates martial arts-related content, live-action movies, and philosophy videos to spread a positive message of peace, love, and benevolence towards all mankind – a philosophy in line with the Unification Church’s motto of “One Family Under God.”



New York resident Takahiro Sakaguchi, currently in Georgetown, Guyana.

The 16 GPA participants who have departed for Georgetown, Guyana are currently constructing a laundry facility for the Joshua Children Center, an orphanage run by members of the Unification Church. Takahiro Sakaguchi, a resident of New York and an aspiring high-school counselor, says that they are working with Habitat for Humanity, a renowned NGO that constructs housing for low-income families.

Sakaguchi credits his church community, Generation Peace Academy and his parents for encouraging him to become an agent of change in the world. “I cannot represent my government at this stage in my life,” he said, “but I can represent my family, my community, and my friends in faith by doing service in another country.” His parents, Takayuki and Nobuko Sakaguchi, said that they encouraged their son to “Be the best you can be” and show the world that anyone can make a difference.