

## Japanese Unificationists Make a Pilgrimage to America

Richard Buessing

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From July to August, American Unificationists welcomed a group of young people from Japan for one month of English language practice while familiarizing themselves with American culture within and outside of the Unification Movement. During their trip, students stayed with host families and met with leaders who taught them more about the history of the Unification Movement in America. To better experience True Father's legacy, they visited sites of significance, including Unification Theological Seminary, Bridgeport University, and the International Peace Education Center (IPEC). On one memorable day, the students even went for a ride down the Hudson River on True Father's fishing boat.

The exchange program began in 2015 when Ryoichi Sawada and Mark Beaudoin from Rhode Island heard that many young Japanese Unificationists wanted to study English and learn more about True Parents' work in the United States. Interest in the program has grown steadily since its original launch. This year, students were divided into three different groups so that everyone could be accommodated. The first cohort came at the end of July. In addition to visiting holy and historical sites, the young people saw Washington, D.C., Plymouth, Massachusetts, Niagara Falls, the Hoover Dam, and the Grand Canyon. While traveling, they practiced English by speaking with everyone they met and reading True Father's autobiography, *As a Peace Loving Global Citizen*.

Before coming on the trip, many of the young Unificationists did not know much about True Father's life or work. To feel more connected to their movement's founder, they decided to participate in the exchange program, knowing that it would give them a chance to walk in places where True Father once walked and

speaking with leaders who knew him during his lifetime. Students remarked that the experience truly was an immersion into American Unification culture and history.



Although they got to see so much of the American landscape and learn more about its history, some of the students admitted that their favorite part was the homestays that took place in Rhode Island, New Jersey, and Maryland. There, they saw and experienced the multiculturalism that is common to American Unificationists and their families. Some exchange students further experienced this multiculturalism during the Blessed Cultural and Sports Festival (BCSF), where they met many young, intercultural Unificationists from across the United States and Canada.

At the end of the trip, participants sadly bid their farewells. The cloudy day seemed to match the mood of everyone present. But before the students left, a double rainbow appeared across the sky, like a reminder from Heavenly Parent that God is always with them.