

GPA Doing Big Things in MD

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GPA does a photo-shoot before heading out to the flower stand.

If there's one word to describe this past weekend, it's "hectic." Other words that apply are "packed," "challenging," and "epic." Looking back on the scale of the project we undertook, and the lengths we were willing to go to, this weekend's Mother's Day fundraising was an unforgettable experience.

A huge thank-you is due to GPA's own Sunny, who spearheaded the fundraising efforts. Without her, we don't know what we would have done. Behind the scenes, Sunny led the efforts to get into contact with people who could help us get flowers, find prime spots, and set up our stands.

By Friday morning, all the flowers had arrived in bulk. There was a flurry of activity as we got buckets, tarps, tables, chairs, and stands together—as well as fundraising boxes and product. We then packed up our flowers and miscellany into the vans, and set up stands around the town of Bowie—one nearby a church, by a highway, and at a gas station.

I know it was difficult for many of us to keep our spirits up this weekend. The weather was unpredictable—with a downpour of rain swiftly following a bright sunny day. We were also on tenterhooks that we might not break even, but I suppose that too is a test of faith. Selling roses by day and wrapping roses by night, the weekend passed. No matter what happened, we know that the weekend was a great success—we did break even, and well over it, too! Besides the clean profit we made for Community Outreach, there were many victories to claim from this weekend—of faith, patience, and going beyond the call of duty, you might say. I was grateful for the experience, and glad to offer up all our efforts that Sunday night—tired, but fulfilled.

The next day, Monday, Mrs. Marchatelli treated us to a victory brunch at IHop. *Mmmmm!* The day was a time for us to recharge, and reenergize before the busy week got underway. While two GPA members went to RTEC to spend time with the Maryland church's youth, the rest went to D.C. for a day of exploring, fun, and fellowship. We visited the Holocaust Museum, the Smithsonian, chilled out next to the Washington Monument, and had an impromptu dance party on the metro, on our way back. (RTEC, an acronym for "Read, Talk, Eat, Chill" is the name of a program that the Maryland church offers for its youth, and it sort of explains itself). For me, the day was unforgettable—such a precious time to spend with my GPA buddies. I think we are all better prepared for the week ahead, having had such a fun, revitalizing experience together.



We just can't contain our enthusiasm!

Adventures in Maryland, Week 2

May 3, 2014

Earlier this week, Generation Peace Academy had the honor of staying at the Hilltop Retreat Learning Center in Hagerstown, Maryland, for two days of education and rejuvenation. The retreat belongs to Mr. and Mrs. Wiemann—the latter of whom is an experienced family and relationship coach. We can't express how lucky we are to have spent two days at such a beautiful location—and with a life coach, on top of that!

The retreat is a secluded, scenic place, settled in the midst of rolling farmland and bordered by dense woodlands. The Wiemann home is a large, picturesque house, with its outdoor dining table, hammock, and flower gardens. The area gives new meaning to the phrase "wide open spaces." For me, having such beautiful surroundings gave me a profound sense of freedom and inspiration, as well as a deep peace—so that I was as prepared as can be for the life-coaching sessions we received. I guess if you really wanted to experience what we did, you would have to go yourself—but to give you an idea, Mrs. Wiemann taught us how to be more peaceful, wiser beings through self-reflection, meditation, emotional healing, and solid relationship advice. We look forward to using her methods of finding inner peace when we once again face our busy schedule.

After our rejuvenating stay at the hilltop, Generation Peace Academy returned to its various activities and projects. On Tuesday we had a hot topic debate, received a talk by Jim Stephens on the differences between men and women, and had a meeting for an event called "WordUp." WordUp is a monthly program designed to empower and inspire the Maryland church community's youth.



The changing of the guard at historical Arlington National Cemetery

Our adventures don't end there, however. This Wednesday Generation Peace Academy got to meet Larry Moffitt, vice president of the Washington Times Association. As well as sharing with us some stories of his early days in the church, Mr. Moffitt talked about the deeper meaning of history, especially the world wars. Fittingly, right after this we got to explore D.C.'s historical hot spots—such as Arlington National Cemetery and the inside of the Capitol Building.

We are so blessed to have had these experiences his week, and we hope that our new knowledge can help us to improve our relationships with the people we love back home. Also, we don't only want to receive from this Maryland community, but be inspired by their giving hearts and return all their love and investment into us. We have some new projects underway which will involve the Maryland community more—so that's something to look forward to in the upcoming weeks.

Internships and Getting Involved – Maryland

April 27, 2014

This week was another short time span packed with many different adventures. It was only until the middle of the week, however, I thought that I should share what has happened so far.

On Monday one of our homestay parents, Mrs. Fefferman, came over and gave an enlightening testimony on her pioneering journey in Iran—building up and supporting the church there. The main message she conveyed was that the youth must have a “pioneering spirit” and take initiative and risks in order to bring positive change and strengthen our life of faith. Ultimately, we have responsibility over our lives and we have to make the effort to open the door and let God in.

The next day we all had our different internships that we selected. A group of five—Simone, Junna, Sunny, Mary, and Nikolai—went to New Hope Academy to do research for the “Gambia Project,” to assist the art teacher, and to work with the preschoolers. The Gambia Project is a yearly project that the Maryland community began, in which a group of volunteers from all over the country have the chance to visit Gambia, Africa, to help improve the living situation of the people there. In particular, they want to implement proper medical care in the area.

We're also interning with Karl—a contractor and handyman, to learn helpful trades—and Will, a successful entrepreneur working in real estate. As well as trying to learn from Mr. Stein, we are also lending him a hand in his day to day jobs. Through this internship, we are experiencing the amount of hours and the hard work it takes to succeed and thrive in business.

Later on in the week, we were invited visit the local boy scout troop and go to a meeting with the Women's Federation for World Peace and Unification (WFWPU). The WFWPU is an initiative for women in the Unification Church, the goal of which is to empower daughters, wives, and mothers to create positive change in the world and develop healthy, loving relationships with their spouses, families, and the global community.

To end of the week, we went to an Open Mic night hosted by the Taylor family. It was an exciting night filled many great and entertaining performances, including Shin Taylor himself performing an original song, and members of our own group going up and offering our talents. That's all for now—see you next week!



We also had the chance to visit the Jones' greenhouse to help out with their gardening



Our visit with the Maryland Boy Scouts



Shin jamming out at Open Mic night

Welcome to Maryland!

April 21, 2014

Greetings blog-readers! We've just arrived in Bowie, Maryland, this Friday. For the time we're staying here—about four weeks—we will strive to play an active part in this community's activities, seeing what Maryland has to offer and using the experience to be able to give more to our own communities back home. There's so much to look forward to, so many exciting projects underway, we don't know where to start.

Our experience so far has been mostly an introduction and a welcome to Maryland—settling into the neighborhood and getting to know the members of the community. Right from the get-go we have been welcomed and showered with so much attention and love from the community. Saturday began with a welcome breakfast and social time, then sports, and even a guidance from one of Maryland's experienced community members, Mr. Boothby. Before we arrived in Maryland, we tried to focus as much as we could on what we could contribute to the church here—but there's also so much to look forward to in the way of receiving guidance and training for going home, on how to help out our communities and also how to take control of our own lives outside Generation Peace Academy. Along with advice on external and internal excellence, there has been much socializing and reuniting with old friends.

This Sunday has topped off this week's experiences—okay, it's only been a few days, but so much has been going on that our heads are spinning. Going to Sunday service at New Hope Academy topped off our experience this week by showing us not only how big the Maryland community is, but how the Unification Church is booming and blossoming. With some of us coming from smaller communities like New Hampshire's, it's encouraging to see how the church has thrived off the hard work of the older generation. On Sunday evening, we got together with the leaders of Maryland's Unification Church Youth Ministry, who are arranging internships for us to gain even more experience for life after Generation Peace Academy.

It feels as if the Maryland community is offering up everything it has to engage our group and make us feel at home. We can't wait for the week to get underway and all our projects to begin. We hope also to give back as much as we can to this beautiful, strong community.