

GPA (Generation Peace Academy) 2014–2015 Begins

Roland Platt
October 1, 2014



Divine Principle lectures were part of this year's GPA launch

Under the guidance of Rev. Ki Hoon Kim, our regional president, and Rev. Michael Balcomb, our national leader, Generation Peace Academy is the training program in the United States for graduating high school students. Students come from all parts of the United States to embark on a yearlong journey to find and strengthen their faith, develop their character and prepare themselves to live meaningful lives. GPA is dedicated to educating members of our next generation so that they can inherit and carry on our True Parents' traditions and practices and lead others toward lives of dedication and service.

On October 1, ninety members our second generation completed GPA's twenty-one-day Kickoff Orientation Workshop. The Unification Theological Seminary served as our workshop site; there, education, team-building challenges, physical endurance training and bonding activities to coalesce as a group took place among the workshop participants.

The program works closely with the American headquarters team to provide the best education and training for those in our second generation and other young Unificationists. In the first week of the workshop, regional President Kim inspired us with his visit and addressed the group. He emphasized how the challenges and struggles of his own two years of pioneering, when he was of a similar age to that of our participants, made him the man that he is today.

Throughout the workshop, the young people learned about the different activities that they will engage themselves in and had ample opportunity to reflect on their purpose, clarify their goals and solidify their intent to make the most of their year.

From now through December, they will be investing themselves in raising funds, which provides them with a spiritual foundation and financial resources for the year. GPA helps young adults to find a principled direction and to practice public-mindedness. GPA emphasizes the importance of making a positive impression on the world. With that goal in mind, one of the most effective ways to prompt internal growth in participants is through fund raising. The act of fund raising can foster virtues such as perseverance, patience and forgiveness.

Winter break and its aftermath

Participants go home for Christmas and the New Year holiday. Our winter break is the first time that the young people see their families in months. Often their experiences in the program have already made it possible for them to empathize with their parents' situations more fully than in the past and they experience a deeper bond with them.

They return to the program in January and go through a seven-day Divine Principle lecturer-training workshop. Their experiences over the first months of the program deepen their hearts and they can gain profound insights into the Principle. One participant, wrote, "God always gave his unconditional love to me, hoping that I would open my heart enough to receive it, but I have usually been too caught up in my own perspective to sense it. Teaching the Divine Principle gave me answers to a problem that has been on my mind for over a year, and I am so grateful to have had the experience of seeing Principle work in this

way."

One more opportunity for a life changing experience is through our Overseas research Projects. We travel to developing countries for twenty-one days to serve people in need and to gain a greater sense of gratitude for the blessings we have been given.

A typical project would be helping to build an orphanage, a school or a community center and investing into the children there. Some of the countries that GPA has served in the past are the Dominican republic, Panama, Peru, Trinidad, Argentina, Thailand and the Philippines. We have visited some countries now for five or six years in a row, building strong relationships, making a difference and leaving a durable impression.



Ninety young people attended the kick-off ceremony

GPA alumni reconnect

One of the highlights in the spring is the Family and Alumni Gathering, which takes place in the Rocky Mountains in Colorado. It is an opportunity for entire families to revive and become inspired. We welcome graduates of the past fourteen years of Special Task Force (STF) and GPA. Community outreach is the next step of their journey, when GPA participants spend time in various Unification Church communities to gain skills in ministry and to engage in witnessing activities. This is designed to stimulate the local church communities with youthful energy and spirit but also to prepare participants to have a successful transition after the program, helping them develop the skills to inspire and empower others.

Having learned much throughout the year about True Parents' course, our participants take time to gain a more intimate experience by visiting historical church landmarks on the East Coast. This pilgrimage takes them to East Garden and Belvedere, the New Yorker Hotel and Manhattan Center, the Washington Times Corporation, the Washington Monument and other places. At each destination, they can hear directly from members who had first-hand experiences with True Parents. These early members share personal memories of their time with True Parents.

Following the pilgrimage, participants can choose what we call a "specialized ministry," which could be studying Unification Thought, developing their relationship with God within creation through adventure training, discovering the joy of domestic service by serving underprivileged people in New York City...

One GPA participant wrote of his experience, "Immersing myself in nature helped me have a much more meaningful appreciation and connection to creation. I have now come much closer to understanding how great this gift of life on earth is and how God created it for us."

Finally, we all meet for our conclusion workshop, which is designed to help all the participants claim the victories of the year and to help them successfully reintegrate themselves into the communities they came from. A beautiful and moving graduation ceremony, attended by families and friends, marks the official end of the year. The majority of the participants go on to college, becoming involved with CARP. Some will become staff member in local youth groups or take active roles in their church community.

A certain number stay on for another year, feeling called to develop their leadership skills. These brothers and sisters go through intensive training in order to become team leaders in their second year. Out of those, a handful will go on to do a third year and work closely with the staff to develop and create the program. Leading teams of members that raise funds causes their hearts to grow -- as illustrated by a testimony from a second-year participant:

The biggest realization and gift from our Heavenly Parent that I received this week has a lot to do with True Father. True Father has always been a symbol of strength to me, a spiritual giant that could take on anything and that was invincible.

Yet, what I began to realize this week is that True Father was a human being just like you and me. The only difference between him and me is that he loved God with a passion so great it occupied his heart and controlled his life. The more he could understand God's heart, understand that this world is in anguish and take on more responsibility, the heavier his heart would become and the more heartbreak and hurt he would be faced with, because that is how our Heavenly Parent feels. Actually, this great man deserves the most sympathy and comfort, more than anyone else. True Father gave repeatedly without ever expecting to receive anything.

So how did this realization shape my week? I began to understand more deeply that because True Father was insanely desperate for God and tried repeatedly to restore the world, I could be here. Everything I hold precious in my life came because True Father could make himself the smallest priority and put me as his number one priority -- above his family, above his comfort, above himself. How could I not try to imitate the desperation True Father had? How could I not try to dedicate the next two weeks of my life to the man who gave me everything? Instead of thinking that True Father is the superhero in my life, I began to shift my mindset.

I need to comfort True Father. I need to understand his life and tap into his passion. I began to see my team members in a different light.

As much as True Father invested into me, he invested into them. As much as my parents love me, their parents love them. Actually, these members are the most precious people in my life, and all I wanted to do was take care of them for True Father, to love them as he would, for God.

We are deeply grateful to True Mother who is the source of our inspiration and leadership, and we will continue to offer our support in any way that we can.