

## GPA Learns God’s Heart through Witnessing in Peru and the Philippines

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In this second update from the 2017 GPA Overseas module, we hear again from the Peru team and for the first time from Philippines team, as they share their lives and faith with the people they meet and learn more about God’s heart in turn.

**Peru – Contributed by Tsugusato and Yuka**

**February 24**

Buenos dias! Good morning Peru and everyone!



Today was our final day of witnessing in Peru. We were all determined to make this last day amazing. Our witnessing location was Los Olivos. It was the first time ever that a GPA team traveled to Los Olivos. Compared to yesterday’s district, Huaycan, it was a much wealthier area: an upper-middle class area where the residents were living quite well.



“Through the last day of witnessing, I realized the true value that we may have to God. Especially our values. Every door I knocked on, I got the feeling that these people don’t have what we have, not just materially but mostly internally... like the basic teachings of our movement, such as living for the sake of

others, how to become ideal people, and family values. That's all something these people have never heard of. Our way of life is hope for the world, and that's why God really values us and needs us to spread hope to others, and that's why I'm out witnessing." –Karen Ishiguro

"Witnessing in Peru was a check into reality, both spiritually and physically. We really had to exercise our internal selves, our heart and energy, because of the language barrier. Personally, I strived to feel the desperate heart of God and True Parents. These people we witnessed to were struggling spiritually, financially, and emotionally, so I felt like a beacon of light in their daily life. In Wycon, I especially felt called to the people. They seemed enslaved to their reality without room to dream. I was just giving them an invitation, but it was so much more than that. That invitation was an opportunity to come back to God. Although witnessing was physically draining, I was able to taste a small part of God's and True Parents' heart." –Reyna Harding



After witnessing for a few hours, we went to a Peruvian restaurant called Lena Red Hot Chicken Grill and had pollo a la brasa, a delicious braised chicken dish. Señora Carmela, the district leader of Los Olivos, shared her testimony about joining the church. She was diagnosed with terminal cancer and even before committing to join, she made a daily condition to study the Divine Principle, suggested to her by the national leader of Peru at the time. Eventually she went back to the doctor's office and was told the cancer was gone. Ever since then, she has been a devout believer and the walls of her house were filled with posters of the Divine Principle. Señora Carmela had a very powerful presence and she even scolded some

the guests after the lecture. The scolding was due to the fact that she had witnessed to them before but they hadn't come and that when they did come, the guests didn't bring more family and friends with them. After returning to the church, we held a 21-minute prayer to set a condition for the guests to attend the workshop. At night, we went to sleep with anticipation for the workshop to come.

Será un día emocionante mañana! It's going to be an exciting day tomorrow!

## February 25

Qué tal estáis todos! What's up everyone!

Today was the conclusion of all the witnessing events we held the last three days in different parts of Peru. We held a Divine Principle workshop on the Principle of Creation and the Human Fall. We spent the morning in preparation and gradually the guests started to arrive one by one.



Despite the language barrier, we went up to each guest and greeted them. A couple of the guests initially had no intention to come but had a change of heart early in the morning and decided to come! Although we didn't understand much during the lectures, we could still sense the passion and the sincerity of the lecturers. It was refreshing to see the Divine Principle taught in a different language and different format. We realized that despite the language barrier, we all received and learned that same truth. While talking to the guests afterwards, we realized many of them were inspired and astounded by the content of the lectures. What may seem to us as basic knowledge about the Principle to them was like a completely new revelation.



During breaks, GPA organized games that people of all ages could play. After the last lecture, testimonies were given by Young-Joo and Matt. It was really profound to see the impact we could have on our

Peruvian guests. During Matt's testimony, many people's hearts were moved to tears. Even after the workshop was over, three guests stayed to join us for dinner. All in all, it was a very successful workshop.



“Today was preparation for our one-day seminar for the people we witnessed to during the last three days. I requested to give a testimony about my personal life in order to teach others about my experiences before GPA. Preparing for my testimony made me nervous because, honestly, a confession of my life to a room of complete strangers and my fellow GPA participants felt daunting. I was unsure of how they'd see me after my testimony, but it was well received and, actually, I was able to move the hearts of a lot of the guests and even moved a few to tears. Overall, it was a successful seminar and a good day. Love makes everyone happy.” –Mathew Harding

“Throughout the lectures today, I was observing the reactions of the guests. The guest sitting in front of me, in particular, was very expressive in his body language. I could see his reaction change from initial outrage to gradual acceptance and finally to enthusiastic support. Watching the guests helped me realize how powerful the content of the Divine Principle is. Over the course of a couple lectures, many guests completely changed their beliefs. Truth is truth no matter what language it's in. In addition, the testimonies given after the lectures as well as the testimonies given during the past three days have helped me realize how much of an impact second-generation Unificationists can have on others. What we consider typical testimonies, the guests saw as inspiring and mature. For myself, I need to have more gratitude for my upbringing as well as the truths that I have received in this church because it is definitely out of the ordinary.” –Anonymous

## **Philippines – Contributed by Yeonhwa**

### **February 22**

Our very first full day in the Philippines! Upon arriving, our GPA group was given the opportunity to go on a grand tour of the Malacanan Palace in Manila, Philippines. The Palace is known to many Filipino citizens but few have actually had the chance to visit the site so it was a very great experience for us. We were given a tour of a government building beforehand where we were able to meet government workers who attend the president of the Philippines. Many of the workers there have a passionate heart to serve the country and ensure the wellbeing of its citizens, which was very inspiring. There we learned about what they are currently up to, hard at work creating a system that allows the citizens to directly contact the government to voice their opinions and desires. “Everyone will be heard and their desires attended to” was the intention they explained to us. After that, the tour through the Malacanan Palace gave us an insight on just a little bit of the history and traditions of this country, from its very beginnings to the present. So many events and people played a part in bringing this country to its current state.

As our schedule was packed for the day, following the tour, we drove over to the airport to fly to our final destination–Bohol. Since the flight was short compared to our first one, the majority of us were awake—some of us socializing among each other, reflecting, and talking to other passengers; and regardless of

what we were doing, always being conscious of keeping a warm and positive atmosphere as representatives of Generation Peace Academy.

When we arrived, we were welcomed by members of the Collegiate Association for Research of Principle (CARP) in chapter in the Philippines. They were so lively and full of energy and joy as they held the banner by the exit. From there, we drove over to a college campus called BISU (Bohol Island State University) college. The room was packed; three rows of tables were set, each table containing the maximum amount of people and still, some members were standing in the back (mainly the CARP members). They had prepared us a banner that read "Welcome Generation Peace Academy." It was a wonderful evening orientation. The members there displayed their patriotism by opening the orientation with the national anthem for the Philippines and Bohol. We all felt so welcomed and loved as the W-CARP members continued to perform songs and dances and their welcome speeches. We were even able to enjoy a dinner sponsored by the vice governor of Bohol. After their performances, GPA performed the song "Home" by Phillip Phillips. It was a night full of energy and the interaction of people filled with passion and love.

February 23

Started the day travelling from Tagbilaran, the main city of Bohol, to a smaller town called Valencia. Arrived at the Casibao Elementary School where we will be doing our service projects for two weeks. We received a warm and heartfelt welcome program set up by the mayor and vice mayor of Bohol along with school officials. The entire student body was present at the event. The mayor and other members of the council were kind and welcoming toward the GPA group.

The vice mayor gave beautiful remarks to the GPA group, really expressing his gratitude and hopes for our project at the school.

One thing that really stuck out from his comments was his desire for us to view the children at the school not just as children but as our younger brothers and sisters. He encouraged us to really have an open and loving heart during our stay there. Interestingly, this was very aligned with our group goal of creating an atmosphere of one family under God. After his kind words, some of the students and teachers of the school performed a few dances for our group.

We then performed a dance and a song for those at the event, wanting to offer even something small with sincerity and love.

After the event and our first lunch at the school we got to work on our main service project. Our service project is to help our Kuyas (Filipino term for older brothers) build a stage for the school. The school hired about five professionals from the area and we had the honor of working alongside them.

There are 21 participants in our GPA group. We were split into two groups to be allocated responsibilities in different areas of the project: one shoveling a pile of lime stones for bagging and the other creating an assembly line to pass it down to the stage where we had to fill in the steps and the wings of the stage to could lay a foundation to be cemented over. In between work, we were showered by love with Filipino style snacks, such delicious aspiniritong saging, or fried bananas. What inspired myself and others was that even as we would take breaks, our Kuyas would continue working rigorously without stopping. Furthermore, after the break, not only were we filled with physical food but felt love from the kids there as they joined forces with us, helping us with the work. They carried bags as wide as their shoulders. They weren't even asked to help but were doing it purely because they wanted to have fun with us by working together with us. Seeing this, some of us were inspired to work harder and do more.

This form of work environment is where you can come to see a glimpse of our Heavenly Father's heart—when He sees His children working hard for Him, sometimes not even realizing the purpose behind it but purely desiring to bring joy to Him and work with Him, He cannot help but want to reach out to us. To lessen our burden. When I saw the kids walking to us with a bag on their shoulders or a rock or two in their hands, I had to get to them as soon as I could to take that weight off of them.

**February 24**

Today was our first full day of work.

From what the Kuyas said, they were sincerely touched by the hard work and investment we were putting into the projects. To them, we were initially a bunch of kids with no experience in hard labor and were here just to "look good." But soon enough, even though there are language barriers, through our actions, they were inspired. They conveyed their message to us that as older brothers, they carry a heart of wanting to do everything for us—to carry all of our dirt filled bags, fill it with cement and support us in that way. We, too, felt their love to us through their actions: while we were working, some of them climbed up a palm tree and cut down coconuts for us so we could taste firsthand what real coconut water

is like. If it were not for a mutual give and take of respect and love within the construction site, this project would have simply been a time of helping and working out of obligation. But with open hearts, the experience was so much more meaningful.

The afternoon and evening consisted of skit preparation, song practice, dance practice and a Philippine culture night organized by the school and CARP Bohol. After singing the Philippines national anthem and the Bohol province song, the event started with prayer. Filipino culture was shared with numerous dances and song presentations as well as some favorite games. One of the games involved two people tossing an uncooked egg from different distances with the goal of not breaking the egg.

It was definitely a time for the GPA team to get a better understanding of not only the culture of the Philippines but the heart of its people. It was also a chance for all of us to interact more with the children and CARP members.

## **February 25**

Today was focused on preparation for our culture night but also for something coming up tomorrow. We were given the mission with CARP Bohol and Ate Merle to remind the village people of the upcoming Marriage Blessing Ceremony that would be held for a number of couples, including several of the students' parents. The event would basically consist of the renewal of wedding vows between the couples that would attend.

It was very exciting, but also something very new for us GPAers. It was somewhat like an intro to witnessing. We found it to be very heartwarming, coming to see for ourselves just how welcoming and open the Valencia people were. Many welcomed us into their homes, where we were able to remind them about the time and details of the event.

Our evening activity consisted of an orientation on "American Culture." But, since American culture is a mixture of cultures, we decided to focus on the aspect of the culture all of us serving in the Philippines are trying to embody—one family under God. Other than GPA and CARP, we are working alongside Cheon Il Guk (CIG) missionaries from Japan and Korea as well. GPA hosted a game and icebreakers for the audience and together with CARP and the Japanese and Korean CIGs, we gave presentations on our mission and culture. Following the presentations, each of the groups performed songs and dances to, in a sense, give back to the community. GPA also prepared two skits to convey the message of one family under God. The first was a performance about the parent-child relationship and the second was of a choir coming together under the direction of their conductor—representing God.

What was beautiful throughout the night was that, some of us were able to experience the feeling of hope that we can come to inherit a culture of heart and unite accordingly. One particular experience that I had was with a young boy named Erl Jung. He is in second grade and so his understanding of English is minimal as is my Tagalog. Regardless, he would always play with me and sat on my lap and spent time with me. On this night, he helped me understand how God feels when His children desire to follow in His footsteps.

Before the skit that I was supposed to perform in, I was picking up candy wrappers off the ground and putting it in the plastic cup that I had finished drinking from. He helped me fill the cup as well, even going out of his way to look for wrappers in different areas. As my group's turn came to perform, I put him down from my lap. When the group had finished performing, Erl Jung was rushing me to my seat seeming very excited. When I got there, he was looking up at me with a big smile on his face, pointing to the ground. He had collected nine plastic cups worth of trash because he wanted to make me happy. I was so proud of him. He helped me realize how proud God is of all of us whenever we do things in this world on behalf of Him. How proud and how much joy we are all capable of bringing to Him.

## **February 26**

Today, excitement was in the air for the couples invited to the Interfaith Blessing Ceremony. The GPAers assisted in the preparation and process of the event by cleaning, practicing songs to perform at the ceremony and welcoming guests.

The ceremony was a very touching event, consisting of songs, a talk on marriage values, and the wedding vow renewals between the couples. Tears were shed, love was expressed, and a light spirit filled the room.

The event ended with delicious food and interaction between the couples, guests, and GPAers.

After the Blessing event the GPAers got together with CARP Bohol to practice the tinikling dance, a beloved dance of the Philippines. It was definitely more challenging than some of us thought it would be but it was a lot of fun.

After that GPA, CARP Bohol, CIG Korea and CIG Japan gathered around a campfire for a night of testimonies and pair-shares, giving members of each group a chance to get to know each other better. Many were inspired to hear each others' experiences and we found that there were both differences and similarities.

One testimony that stuck out to me was shared by a sister named Kana, who was a member of CIG Japan. She had gotten into witnessing through a shorter program and felt called to become a Cheon Il Guk missionary through dreams and revelations in prayer. She expressed how God was guiding her all along the way, ultimately to be here in this moment.

The intention of this activity was for us to learn that, though we come from different countries and arrived here through different methods, it is no coincidence that we were all able to come together in this time and place with each other. It was a wonderful experience.

### **February 27**

Today was our outing day! The first thing planned was a trip to the beach. Though the weather was a bit cloudy and rainy, it felt just right for a day spent outside.

We read God's word and received a morning service about understanding God's heart of love and gratitude toward our investment and experience here. After that we spent time with one another playing volleyball, singing Karaoke, or simply spending time in the beautiful nature provided by the sandy beach and warm ocean waters. It was definitely a chance to feel God's love through interacting with our surroundings.

The rest of our day consisted of much sightseeing. After spending time at the beach we had lunch on a boat tour down the Loboc River. The tour involved delicious Filipino cuisine, live music and a beautiful view.

After lunch we continued our sightseeing by paying a visit to the Hanging Bridges over the Loboc River and the Chocolate Hills, a geological wonder because the hills are all the same size. They say the Chocolate Hills are the coldest place in the Philippines because the chocolate never melts.

The day ended with a visit to Ate Merle's home in Carmen, Bohol and dinner altogether. It was a day filled with fun and getting to know each other.