

Young Leaders Connect and Learn through RYS Project

Tomiko Duggan, Susan Fefferman; and William Selig
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Washington, D.C., USA—From July 12-15, 2015, the Religious Youth Service (RYS) held a service project in Washington, D.C. Twenty-three young leaders from as far as Russia and Azerbaijan, as well as New York, New Jersey, Virginia, Maryland, and Washington, D.C., participated. This is the third consecutive year in which RYS has held this program in the U.S. capital.

The Religious Youth Service (RYS), a project of UPF, was initiated by Rev. Dr. Sun Myung Moon and his wife, Dr. Hak Ja Han Moon, at the first Assembly of the World's Religions in 1985. For the past 30 years, RYS has organized hundreds of interfaith service projects in more than 70 nations, with participants representing diverse religious and spiritual backgrounds. Advisors have included Dr. Huston Smith, author of *The World's Religions*, a study of comparative religion, Dr. Paulos Mar Gregorios, Archbishop of the Orthodox Syrian Church, and many other interfaith leaders.

Day One: On the morning of July 12, the participants gathered at Gallaudet University in Washington, D.C., which served as the home-base, providing sleeping quarters and breakfast, for the four-day experience.

A lot of preparation was needed to set up appointments and planned meetings with the U.S. Department of State, U.S. Department of Education, members of the U.S. Congress, think tanks, and diplomatic personnel, as well as assure that the participants would experience and be exposed to the teachings of other faiths.

The program began with a warm welcome by Mrs. Tomiko Duggan, director of RYS-Washington, D.C. Each participant then introduced themselves and expressed their personal aspiration for their time together. Dr. William Selig, deputy director of the UPF Office of Peace and Security Affairs, went through the schedule to give the participants a full understanding of the many activities planned for the week.

After lunch, they piled into two vans, which brought them to the National Mall, where they began their day of sightseeing of some of the city's most famous monuments: the Lincoln Memorial, the Vietnam War Memorial, the Korean War Veterans Memorial, and the Martin Luther King, Jr. Memorial. At the Lincoln Memorial, the group gathered on the exact spot where Dr. King delivered the "I Have a Dream" speech. Walking through the memorials, the participants gained a greater sense of what freedom means and the sacrifice so many men and women have made to safeguard their nation's safety. One RYS participant said he came to understand the meaning of "freedom is not free."

The participants were invited to dinner at the Peace Embassy, where UPF-Washington, D.C. regularly organizes educational and cultural programs. A delicious curry rice dinner, watermelon and ice cream refreshed everyone after a long day in the summer heat. Dr. Antonio Betancourt, director of the UPF Office of Peace and Security Affairs in Washington, D.C. spoke to the participants about his unique experiences in the field of international peace and development in the past 40 years.



Day Two: The Interfaith education began with an RYS tradition, a candle lighting ceremony in which each participant reads a quote about world peace and understanding, including from Mother Teresa, Saint Francis of Assisi, the Dalai Lama, Rev. Moon, and other religious leaders.

The first speaker on religious education was Rabbi Mark Rafael, who has served congregations in Connecticut, New York and Maryland during 31 years of pulpit leadership. Representing the Jewish faith, the rabbi distributed a handout on the basic principles of Judaism, which all the participants appreciated. Rabbi Rafael then brought out a Torah on wood dowels and explained its meaning. Wearing a yarmulke (skull cap), he passed around a prayer shawl and Tefillin (which are small black leather boxes containing scrolls of parchment inscribed with verses from the Torah and are worn on the forehead and wrapped around the arm while praying). He said prayer is like “an engagement ceremony with God, each time, [one is] pledging ones unfailing love and dedication.” He described the nature of God, the 13 principles of faith, common terms of Judaism, and different types of Judaism. He also said that people are born Jewish if their mother is Jewish, but can become Jewish through study. “Judaism is a peoplehood,” he added. He also said that every religion has one form of the Golden Rule, which is universal to all faiths. He concluded by saying, “Tikun (restoration or healing) is the purpose of life; [it] helps family and community bring a blessing on oneself and others. Be a blessing to others.”

The next speakers, representing Christianity, were Rev. Tony Brazelton, and his wife, Cynthia, who lead Victory Christian Ministries. He gave a sermon-like presentation with a lot of energy and passion. He stated that “In Christianity, mankind is more than what we can see on the outside. Inside each of us is the ‘image of God.’” He said, “we were all in God before He created us, before the foundation of the earth. The journey of a Christian is to restore mankind back to [its] rightful position.” He used three volunteers to visually demonstrate the spirit, soul and body. “The spirit lives between the worlds, the soul is the mind where ideas and decisions come from, and the body lives in the earthly home. The spirit was cut off from God due to sin and Jesus died our death to restore the spirit burdened by sin. If any man be in Christ, he is a new creation,” he said. Pastor Brazelton encouraged the participants to attend church to “bring [their] spirit, soul and body together, which will lead [them] to the Heavenly Kingdom on earth. That is the story of Christianity.”

Representing Native American Religions was Dr. Dottie Chiquello, former assistant director of the Office of Multi-Ethnic Student Education at the University of Maryland. She explained that the religion of Native Americans was destroyed by Europeans, and narrated the history of persecution of the native peoples. “Native Americans weren’t considered citizens until June 24, 1924,” she said. Dr. Chiquello also spoke about the annual United National Indian Tribal Youth conference in Washington, D.C., which this year was held from July 10-14, 2015. Approximately 1,800 youth attended and had the opportunity to engage in conversations about self-identification and what it’s like to be an indigenous person. Dr. Chiquello concluded by saying that there is a Father God/sky and a Mother God/earth, and that it is important to clean the earth...save the earth. “I didn’t hear God give out land to people...don’t abuse Mother Earth,” she said.



Mr. Ricardo de Sena, president of UPF-USA, offered an overview of Unificationist teachings. He said that everyone is seeking to be happy, no matter who they are or where they live. He explained that the sacred text of the Unification Church is the Divine Principle and that it begins with the “Principle of Creation” to discover and know God more deeply. All things are a manifestation of God, both invisible and visible. Human beings are in the direct image of God, and all the rest of creation is an indirect image of God. “God longs to unite in love with all His creation,” and the purpose of life is to come in unity with God and give joy to one another, he said. He used three volunteers to illustrate the struggle in the Garden of Eden, where Adam, Eve and the Archangel were all participants in the actions that initiated the separation from God. Rev. Moon had to struggle for many years to discover the cause of human suffering. Mr. de Sena encouraged everyone to constantly search for meaning: “The establishment of the Kingdom of Heaven is the goal of us all,” he said.

Afterwards, everyone enjoyed a delicious lunch, which was followed by an insightful presentation by Mr. Thomas McDevitt, chairman of The Washington Times, who spoke about the vision that the founders, Rev. and Mrs. Moon, had for establishing the Times: it was not about profit but a broader vision to benefit humankind and the world. The founders felt that the media matters because it brings information into the minds of people, and should be balanced and truthful, and not full of hidden ‘agendas.’ He showed the 30th anniversary video of the Times with clips from world leaders, including former U.S. President Ronald Reagan, former British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher and others. He also shared a quote from Rev. Moon, saying that, “The media must become the conscience of society.” That idea has guided the Times to uphold what is true through conservative universal values. He also spoke about Rev. Moon’s teaching of Headwing philosophy to bring peace between the ideologies of Communism and Democracy, and to uplift the family. To that end, in 1991, Rev. and Mrs. Moon traveled to North Korea to meet Kim Il-sung, the leader of the country, who had imprisoned and nearly killed Rev. Moon in a prison during the Korean War. When he met Kim Il-Sung, he treated him as a brother, just as he did when he met with Mikhail Gorbachev, leader of the Soviet Union, a year earlier. Rev. Moon practices the way of Jesus, who said we are to love our enemy. In conclusion, Mr. McDevitt said that as the Times enters a more digital era, its guidelines are: “Freedom, family, faith, and service in citizenship.”

Dr. Sahar Khamis spoke representing Islam. An associate professor in the Department of Communication at the University of Maryland, Dr. Khamis is an expert on Arab and Muslim media and the author of *Islam Dot Com: Contemporary Islamic Discourses in Cyberspace* and *Egyptian Revolution 2.0: Political Blogging, Civic Engagement and Citizen Journalism*. She spoke about the meaning of Islam and the Muslim faith: Islam means “the total submission to the will of one god: God, the Creator of everything seen and unseen.” Quoting the Koran, she said, “God did not create you all in one group,” meaning we should respect one another because God made us different. The prophet Mohammad was sent as a “mercy” to the entire world, not just Arabs. Islam considers Judaism and Christianity to be religions of the book and predecessors of Islam. All religious prophets are included in Islam and the Koran and the Hadith, sayings of Mohammad, she added. Dr. Khamis described the five pillars of Islam:

Shahadah: proclaim the faith in the one God and his final prophet, Mohammad.

Salat: Pray five times a day to be in constant connection to God.

Sawm: Fasting one month, sunrise to sundown. No food, no water, no sexual relations allowed.

Zakat: 2.5% tithe of one’s savings to the poor.

Hajj: Pilgrimage to Mecca, the sacred place of Muslims in Saudi Arabia, once in a lifetime, if possible.



Dr. Khamis said that contrary to popular belief, women have important rights in Islam. They can own property, inherit and run a business. They can divorce and write clauses in a marriage contract before signing it and can block their husband from having additional wives.

Representing Hinduism was Minister Amar Nath Gupta. He is a former diplomat from India and is currently head priest at the Capital Hindu Temple, the largest temple in the Washington, D.C. area. He opened his remarks by blowing the conch shell, a traditional act in Hinduism. The sound of the conch is associated with the sacred syllable AUM, the first sound of creation. In the Hindu religion, according to Minister Gupta, we are all one family under God and that all religions are valuable and part of God's plan. He gave out a sheet explaining the basic teachings of Hinduism and focused on the practice of yoga as a tool for peace because it builds not only self-awareness, but also teaches peaceful co-existence, respect and teamwork. A yoga center, he said, was established by the president of India near the Afghan-Russian border to bolster a greater sense of partnership in the region. He also mentioned that Rev. and Mrs. Moon sent him with 120 clergy on a speaking tour to 120 nations to promote world peace. He concluded by saying, "Lead a simple and healthful life with God."

Representing Buddhism, Gen (meaning senior teacher of the Kadampa tradition) Kelsan Varahi, a resident teacher at the Vajrayogini Buddhist Center for more than 15 years spoke on the key teachings of Buddhism. She began by saying that "God is in us and is our potential." We need to train our minds toward good thinking and good actions through meditation, she said, and introduced the three "Jewels" of Buddhism: (1) Dharma is the internal refuge of our heart and can transform the mind; (2) the Buddha gave us the precious teachings, and (3) Sangra is the spiritual community where practice becomes spontaneous. She said that in meditation, we do not relax, but empty the mind, focus on breathing, and when we do, we can begin to contemplate and change our point of view from the mind to the heart, where good actions are born; it is an exercise that seeks to make good actions spontaneous and natural. Speaking about the principle of karma, she said, "if we have made bad choices and actions in life, we go to a lower body; if we were good, we can rise into a higher body or realm. She said our karma causes all our actions, thoughts and speech, and can have positive or negative effects. Many causes originate in our previous lives, and hence the expression, "bad things happen to good people and good things happen to bad people." Our intentions are the key; "mindful actions" are needed. The Buddha said, "No action is random," as a guide for moral discipline. When we reach pure compassion, we naturally want others not to suffer without concern for our own life. "In the human realm, suffering is necessary to develop compassion...that imprint develops at the end of our life and will determine how we are reborn."

The education day continued in the afternoon with a visit to three houses of worship: (1) The Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception, the largest Roman Catholic church in the United States; (2) The historic Sixth & I Synagogue, and (3) The Islamic Center, during evening prayers, which all the participants were pleased to be able to observe. The female participants wore traditional scarves for modesty. After dinner, participants met in teams and finished the day writing down their reflections.

Day Three: The day began with meditation and breakfast at Gallaudet followed by a visit to the U.S. Department of State, where the participants met with Ms. Carol A. Cox, desk officer in the Bureau of West African Affairs covering Niger and Mauritania. She spoke about the work her office does for Africa and then was asked to share about her personal experience so that the participants could understand what it takes to become a member of the U.S. Foreign Service. She served in Nigeria, Canada, India, Luxembourg, and Ethiopia. She explained members of the diplomatic corps are usually "randomly"

assigned to countries where they will serve, but also said that sometimes they do get to choose where they would like to be placed. She also elucidated the process of tests and interviews, and the educational requirements needed to be considered a candidate. One of the participants asked how she felt about America after serving abroad. Ms. Cox replied that she had gained a greater sense of pride and love for her nation after seeing what it's like in countries of the world which do not enjoy the basic liberties of freedom that Americans enjoy and too often take for granted.



The group continued on to the Center for Faith-based and Neighborhood Partnerships at the U.S. Department of Education, where they met with Rev. Brenda Girton-Mitchell, director; Mr. Ken Bedell, senior advisor; and Ms. Anna Leach, confidential assistant, at the Center. Rev. Girton-Mitchell explained that their office doesn't teach religion or promote it, but "utilizes the unique and powerful resources of religious people to help those in need." She said, "We learn that communities are doing great things because of faith. The government and these people can collaborate to make a better world through service." Rev. Girton-Mitchell encouraged the participants to get involved in the President's Interfaith and Community Service Campus Challenge, which will begin at Howard University in Washington, D.C. in September to create campuses that involve students in this religious/government service effort.

The group rushed over to Capitol Hill to eat lunch and meet Congresswoman Donna Edwards, a democrat representing Maryland, but were told that she was in a meeting with U.S. Presidential candidate, Hillary Clinton, so we met with the staff members and took photos. The next stop was a tour of the Capitol, organized by Congressman Chris Van Hollen, a democrat representing Maryland, including an explanation of the Rotunda and National Statuary Hall.

Then, the group visited one of UPF's supporters on Capitol Hill, Congressman Danny Davis, a democrat representing Illinois. He talked about the "imbalance" in American history: the U.S. Declaration of Independence states, "We hold these truths to be self-evident... that all men are created equal." It only referred to educated and land-owning men and did not include women and slaves. It wasn't until 1920 that women could vote. And slaves were considered 3/5 human beings for voting purposes (after the 3/5 Compromise was enacted in 1787). He also spoke about how he grew up going to a one-room school in Arkansas. He started teaching Sunday school at the age of 12 and lived in a culture of "KYB" (Know Your Bible). He said that had it not been for church, where he learned to recite and speak, he would not have become a member of Congress. "We are the sum total of our life experiences," he said. He went on to describe the diverse congressional district he represents which comprises Lake Michigan, along which the richest of the rich live; Chinatown; Greektown; Old Town; Bronzeville, the oldest Black neighborhood; and the west suburbs. As a congressman, his job is to figure out what people in his community need from him. He spends a lot of time helping the poor and disadvantaged. He said, "I hate war, and it's not easy to vote for war, but we must protect ourselves and the lives of others." Congressman Davis believes that a strong defense is a deterrent against war. He was granted a deferment to serve in Vietnam and had, at the time, did not recommend anyone attend military academies. Now, however, he does, because we need "good leaders for a strong defense." The Congressman was so inspired, he sang his favorite song, "Peace in the Valley." The group took photos and thanked him for his inspiring words.

The last congressional office the group visited was that of Congressman Sam Johnson, a republican representing Texas. The congressman is an elderly man, who is respected by both parties because he is fair in his relationships. A decorated war hero, who served in both the Korean and Vietnam Wars, Congressman Johnson spoke about his experience as a prisoner of war (POW) during the Vietnam War. While flying over Vietnam, his plane was shot down. He spent three years as part of the "Alcatraz Eleven," a group of eleven American POWs who, although tortured daily and held in solitary confinement, resisted giving their North Vietnamese captors any information. Mr. Johnson and his fellow

POWs emerged strong in their beliefs in freedom. He received the Congressional Medal of Honor and was called “the most admired Republican member” of Congress in 2009.



A group photo was taken in front of the U.S. Capitol, the seat of the U.S. Congress, overlooking the National Mall. Dinner was at The Times followed by an evening forum on, “The Role of Religion in Peace-Building.” Dr. Antonio Betancourt, director of the UPF Office of Peace and Security in Washington, D.C. was emcee. Speakers included:

Dr. Zainab Chaudry, outreach manager in Maryland of the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR), who spoke about the role of religions in building peace. “Religions can build bridges and help reduce conflict.” While historically some leaders have used religion to divide people, leading to conflict, other leaders have used their faith for peace. Rev. Desmond Tutu, a South African Anglican bishop and social rights activist, for example, showed that apartheid was against the values of Christianity and helped to bring peace to South Africa. Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King, Jr. were religious leaders who also took a stand for peace. Dr. Chaudry quoted a Pakistani leader who said that the 6th pillar of Islam should be humanitarianism, regardless of religion. In the post 9/11 world, many Muslim communities have been reaching out to build bridges with other communities of faith and that also many non-Muslims want to understand more about the teachings of Islam. She spoke about several examples of this: a conference in Jordan discovering the similarities between Christianity and Islam and the Saudi Embassy allowing Saudi students to come to the U.S. to work and experience life in America, and engage in interfaith dialogues toward peace.

Dr. Zulfiqar Kazmi, executive director of The Commongrounds USA, an organization network dedicated to the promotion of interfaith dialogue and inter-religious cooperation. He said, “Any religious person who foments disunity is not practicing the tenants of his faith.” He emphasized the need to bring different sides of a conflict together in dialogue to promote peace. He concluded by saying that “The role of religion is essential in peacebuilding.”

Mr. Ralph Winnie, Jr., director of the China Program at the Eurasian Center, spoke on his efforts in peace-building with China. He shared personal stories and how he learned the basic values of integrity and respect from his family and how he applied these fundamental rules of conduct to his business and diplomatic relations with the Chinese.

The last speaker was Mr. Ricardo de Sena, president of UPF-USA, presented UPF’s principles of peace. He spoke about the founding principles of the UN which, “thus far hasn’t been able to fulfill its vision for world peace.” He spoke of Rev. and Mrs. Moon’s recommendation to create a religious body representing all the world’s religions to advise the political leaders to help resolve conflicts, mediate difficult relationships and act as moral guide to world leaders.

Day Four: After meditation and breakfast at Gallaudet, the participants visited the Embassy of the Republic of Indonesia. The embassy is decorated with paintings and other artwork that displays the harmony and natural beauty of and testifies to the religious peace among the peoples of Indonesia, a nation of 253 million people.



The next stop was the International Center for Religion and Diplomacy (ICRD), a non-governmental organization (NGO) that works with local partners in different countries to resolve identity-based conflicts that exceed the reach of traditional diplomacy by incorporating religion as part of the solution. The group was briefed by Mr. Michael Braeuninger, director of development and outreach, and Ms. Nicole Magney, executive assistant to the president, Douglas Johnston (who also founded the organization), who spoke about ICRD's projects including one helping teachers of Madrassas, Islamic religious schools, in Pakistan reform education to have a broad view of the world, teaching tolerance across faiths. In this way, peace education is fostered in young students. In Saudi Arabia, the country's Ministry of Education is now removing messages of intolerance in textbooks. ICRD has also helped develop a Koranic-based textbook of peace. The organization additionally works in Colombia to help reintegrate child soldiers from FARC (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia—People's Army), a guerilla movement involved in continuing armed conflict in the country since 1964. Most of the children are uneducated, abused and confused about what role in society they can play. The spiritual dimension of ICRD's work addresses the necessary healing. In Yemen, when it is safe for its members to work, the organization teaches conflict resolution within peace committees of different religious groups.

The next stop was the The Eisenhower Executive Office Building (EEOB), formerly known as the Old Executive Office Building (OEOB) to meet Ms. Taylor Lustig and Ms. Yasmina Cergui, policy assistants to the White House Office of Faith-based and Neighborhood Partnerships, which oversees the other 13 federal offices in different sections within the government that deal with faith-based issues and works to help faith communities help serve people better. Following the mass shooting at the Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in downtown Charleston, South Carolina on June 25, they helped faith leaders protect houses of worship. Established under President George W. Bush, the office was expanded under President Barack Obama. The Office is currently preparing for Pope Francis' visit to the capital in September.

The group had a picnic-style lunch in a small park across the street from the Heritage Foundation, a conservative think tank. Inside the cool interior, Ms. Danielle Doane, senior program manager with the B. Kenneth Simon Center for Principles and Politics, addressed the participants. The Heritage Foundation is a tax and government free non-profit organization that is supported by donors alone. It is important not to accept government money to be able to say "no" when someone in the government wants them to change something, she said. The Foundation's target audience is Capitol Hill and the White House, which is why it is located within walking distance from Congress. "How do we influence public policy?" Ms. Doane asked—by presenting research and studies done on the grassroots and offering it to busy politicians. The Heritage Foundation is often accused of giving politicians a "guilty conscience" about bad legislation, and offering good ideas in its place. One issue in which the Foundation believes is that healthcare shouldn't be run by the government, but there are no real alternatives yet to the Affordable Care Act ("ObamaCare"). Medicare has huge fraud issues because it has no real beneficiaries and has no real boss to oversee its practices. The patients never see how much the doctor or lab charges the government for their services. The Heritage Foundation is working to help set standards for funds spent on education to make it more affordable to students.



In the late afternoon, the volunteers did a service project in collaboration with the Washington, D.C. Mayor's Office on Volunteerism. They pulled weeds and planted vegetables at the Neighborhood Farm Initiative, a farm in in northeast Washington, D.C, where foods are locally grown and donated to poor families. Despite it raining, everyone's spirit remained upbeat and inspired.

The farewell dinner was at The Washington Times. The evening's guest speaker was former 15-term Congressman, Dan Burton, who encouraged everyone to consider becoming a congressman. He shared about his humble beginnings and how he worked hard to make America better. He concluded his speech and encouraged RYS Participants to "set [their] goal, never give up, maintain steady efforts, and hold on to [their] dream."

Each participant was presented with a certificate of recognition as a Young Ambassador for Peace, and took a photo with Hon. Burton and his wife, Samia, who encouraged them to do even greater work as promising young leaders of tomorrow. Photo-taking, music and singing followed the happy and successful conclusion of this summer's Religious Youth Service program in Washington, D.C.

