

A vision of Parks of Peace - the Americas: North, South, and Central, united

Carol Pobanz

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Picture the Americas: North, South, and Central, united beyond international borders. This is the vision of Nutley, New Jersey resident and Unificationist Carol Pobanz. For years, Carol dreamed of creating Parks of Peace where groups from different nations, even those in conflict with one another, could come together to promote unity. The parks, created by people of all religions, races, and nationalities, would serve as a symbol of what is possible when people unite under common goals. Today, Carol's dreams are being realized in Tela, a small town on the coast of Honduras. There, a group of community members and volunteers have been working since January to create and maintain the very first Peace Park.

Carol first came up with her vision for Parks of Peace after hearing True Father encourage the creation of peace zones on international borders. "My mind caught this idea," explains Carol, "and I began to think that... we could build 'Parks of Peace' on the borders where nations, even conflicting nations, could engage in cultural exchange." Carol continued to develop her idea as years passed. "I thought at that time that these parks should be built by young people from those bordered nations so that the park would be a reflection and expression of their solidarity."

The theme for the first peace park is Una Sola America: there is Only One America. These words can be seen by visitors and children as they walk and play along the swings and benches at the new park.

During the latest phase of the Una Sola America Project, which will take two more years to complete, Pobanz traveled to Honduras with a group of 14 young people from North and Central America. From August 7 to the 17, they worked alongside members of the community to build an obelisk, lay the foundation for a gazebo, create mosaics on the park benches, and paint the sidewalks with peace quotes. It was especially delightful for Carol to see local children coming to help wherever they could. "They eagerly dug and lugged, raked and painted, cut and cemented hour after hour," reports Carol.

Although the peace park project is in full swing, Carol has encountered setbacks which slowed down the creative process. "We had three days in which the municipality froze our advancement as we waited for an official decision to be made," she explained. Luckily, members of the community volunteered to help complete the gazebo and continue with park maintenance after most of the participants had left. Looking back, she feels grateful for the setbacks, which encouraged the creation of a more sustainable and stronger community bond.

Carol plans to bring another group of young people to Tela in 2018 to continue her work. "I look forward to returning to this community because it is not just another community- this community has made us a part of them," she explains. Special thanks to the cosponsors who have made the park possible, including the Family Federation for World Peace and Unification (FFWPU) of New Jersey, the Women's Federation for World Peace (WFWP) of New Jersey, and PeaceIN, a project of the Universal Peace Federation (UPF) of USA and Honduras.