

CARP Vienna, Austria implements CARP America's STEP UP program

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For a while, I have had the wish to give new life and spirit to the young people of our church in Vienna, Austria. This wish emerged after doing a year of Special Task Force (STF Europe) 2013–2014, during which I could more deeply experience what it meant to live a life of faith, a life of sacrifice with love for my brothers and sisters and a life of following in True Parents' footsteps. I wanted to bring back this feeling of working hard for a higher purpose to the young people of my community. However, inspiring and finding young people willing to join or invest themselves into witnessing activities turned out to be challenging. Even though in the beginning not many people wanted to participate, this wish remained strong in my heart.

Over time, we found people and initiated gatherings and activities. With the help of a first-generation member, Robert Stefanc, and some CARPIes, we created a group called the "Vitalizing Youth Group" in the summer of 2015, with the vision of energizing the spirituality and stimulating the heart-based growth of young people. We had weekly gatherings at which we read Hoon Dok Hae material, gave lectures or shared experiences or ideas to benefit one another. Later, it turned into a World Scripture study group, in which we even invited guests from a university.

International connections

After attending the Global Top Gun Workshop in Korea in February 2016, I could make my first contact with CARP America, which seemed to have fresh spirit for reviving CARP. Then at the European Leaders meeting in Prague that year, I met Nina Urbonya, the international liaison from CARP America, again. She planned to take a tour through Europe to present the STEP UP program.

Good fortune made it possible for her to visit our community and therefore we organized a meeting at which she could speak to the Viennese CARP members. The content, which was simple, practical and based on the Principle, inspired me. I recognized that this material and the method of presenting it would fit our situation and I saw the potential for it to bring together second-generation members and young university students.

Some details on the program

The Step Up (Student Empowerment through Unification Principles) program is a series of interactive lectures that CARP America designed with the aim of empowering students by engaging them with seven unification principles:

1. We all come from the same common source, a God of love.
2. We all ultimately want to experience joy.
3. Each person is a valuable part of humanity.
4. We have the freedom to create and manifest any possibility.

5. We mature through pursuing truth, beauty and goodness.
6. We can develop genuine relationships through sincere and selfless interaction.
7. We contribute to society through mastery of our unique creativity.

Testing local responses

To be able to utilize these lectures, CARP America offered a webinar for us, which Lukas L. (a member of the Vienna HARP team), Jennifer B. (the Vienna youth pastor) and I (a member of the Vienna CARP team) went through. After completing this webinar, we organized two Step-Up lectures in Vienna in order to try out the new material. In our first lecture, we talked about the unification principle, "We all ultimately want to experience joy." In this session, we let the participants reflect about what is blocking their way to happiness and how to overcome these obstacles. Fourteen people attended this lecture, including a guest from a university. In the second STEP UP lecture, we presented the principle, We have the freedom to create and manifest any possibility.

Finding momentum

In July, I participated in CARP America's Global Momentum 2016, a five-day program for CARP members to "gain clarity, confidence, practical skills and a supportive network," in Las Vegas, Nevada. During that time, I was able to gain a deeper understanding and experience of CARP America's vision and what the STEP UP program meant in that context. This experience gave me the strength and clarity to take the next steps.

Before the next semester started, Jennifer and I reached out to several CARP members in order to form a core outreach team, but this proved to be rather complicated. Therefore, we held a special lecture for the older HARP members who had just finished high school and who might possibly be interested in our activities. Our plan for the next semester was to have a Step Up lecture every second Thursday combined with a social event every other week. The idea behind this was to focus on internal guidance during one week and the following week to have an opportunity to develop deeper relationships with guests (newcomers, beginners).

A more thorough trial

From October to January, we held seven individual STEP UP lectures at the Vienna CARP Center. CARP members presented six of these lectures and Dr. Wolfgang Czerny, a first-generation member, presented the last lecture just before the Christmas break. The newcomers were either friends of CARP members, colleagues from university or work, or people to whom first- or second-generation members were witnessing.

Besides giving the lectures, several CARP members were always ready to help as master of ceremonies, in preparing the buffet, by taking pictures or simply by being at our events. The number of participants varied from ten to twenty-one. We counted seven newcomers from all the events.

In December, one of our beginners, a young woman who is originally from Albania, joined CARP and the Family Federation. She already knew the Divine Principle from Albania and was happy to find us in Austria.

She attended almost all of our lectures, together with two of her Iranian university friends. Another newcomer joined our activities due to an unexpected (or guided) meeting with one of our CARP members on the metro.

A Divine Principle workshop

As a conclusion of our activities for that semester and in order for our regular participants and newcomers to go deeper, we held a one-day Divine Principle workshop in the beginning of February. The motto of this workshop was "Be the change you want to see in the world," because it connects to the general idea of the STEP UP lectures on developing one's character and contributing to society.

Altogether, we were twenty-five people: seventeen participants, including five beginners, and eight staff members. We had the chance to listen to lectures from two people (a first and a second-generation member) on the Principle of Creation, the Human Fall, the Purpose of the Messiah, and the Last Days.

The God question

Group discussions gave participants opportunities to express their reactions to what they had heard. Then,

in groups, participants had to argue for or against God's existence. Each group then selected one member to take part in a panel discussion on God's existence. One beginner, who decided to defend God's existence even though initially he had claimed not to have a strong belief in him, pleasantly surprised us. The debate was very lively, and it made our minds desperate to find arguments for God's existence. I think that such discussions can help us to strengthen our ability to speak up for our beliefs in society.

The feedback from everyone was generally good. One guest, who had planned to leave the workshop earlier, changed her plans and stayed longer with us; another one hopes for more workshops like this. One CARP member wrote that the number of beginners inspired her and she was able to gain a lot from them, especially in the discussions.

A foundation for growth

The STEP UP program itself and CARP America's support have definitely helped us develop outreach activities in Vienna and helped the young people of our community build stronger bonds among themselves. The events we held offered opportunities for people to share about their lives, based on the seven unification principles. They have also allowed people who were looking for orientation in their lives to find it.

Seven newcomers in total seems to be a small number, but for us this number represented a big success, because it shows that we can share True Parents' teachings with other people in our society and that they can also feel inspired by the teachings.

I believe that we are opening a way in Vienna for the young people to connect with True Parents' vision and creating an environment in which they can enact that vision.

For the coming semester, our plan is to build stronger relationships with the beginners and to study the Divine Principle more deeply together so that they come to recognize True Parents' significance. To bring our character development program to a higher level, one of our plans for this summer is to organize activities in Albania for them.