

The Generation Peace Academy (GPA) Graduation

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On June 14, 2014, the Generation Peace Academy (GPA) concluded a year of personal growth, discovery and faith with a beautiful and incredibly moving commencement ceremony at the Unification Theological Seminary. One hundred twenty participants and more than 100 friends and family gathered from around the country to celebrate the culmination of a challenging yet inspirational year, and the proceedings of the commencement and the final few days leading up to this grand finale reflected the depth of heart that GPA participants and staff cultivate in this program.

The GPA 2013-2014 year concluded with a five-day workshop at UTS, during which participants heard alumni testimonies on transition and celebrated the relationships they have created. Many exciting speakers bestowed their knowledge and wisdom, including Crescentia DeGoede, director of the Blessing and Family Ministry; Naokimi Ushiroda, president of the Collegiate Association for the Research of Principles (CARP USA)—both of whom are alumni of the Special Task Force (STF), GPA's predecessor—and Joe Leonard, a pastor from New Jersey who helped found the STF. All three speakers provided insight into applying what is learned in GPA to life beyond GPA, and transitioning into home and community life. GPA graduates are eager to build powerful lives of faith as they begin the next phase of their lives, which for many include university studies and career development.



The culmination of the workshop was the GPA commencement. Naokimi Ushiroda emceed the program, while Demian Dunkley, the FFWPU USA director of evangelism, offered the invocation. GPA Director Roland Platt congratulated the graduates for a year well done, completed with sincerity and as a total offering to God and True Parents. Keynote speaker Dr. Ki Hoon Kim, the continental director of FFWPU North America, said how precious it was that young people from around the United States could take the time to focus on their relationship with God and True Parents. He related the depth and value of their

growth and devotion to God with a story of the times he had read their testimonies aloud to True Mother and had not been able to hold back his tears.



Four GPA participants shared some of those very testimonies in a part of the program dedicated to highlighting their “defining moments.” A first-year participant, told how she had come to GPA at a time in her life when she was facing personal uncertainty in the Unification faith. While fundraising with GPA, she was able to feel God’s love toward others and see the world as “one family under God.” Her year spent on GPA has led to discovering and building a personal relationship with God and True Parents.

A second-year participant, told how through her GPA experiences she truly could feel her identity as a child of God and True Parents. She was able to meet True Mother in Hawaii and participate in the GPA Pilgrimage Tour, experiences which gave her much insight into the sacrifice and investment True Parents made for America.



A third-year participant said that before GPA, she never could imagine marrying and having a family. However, after having deep experiences with God, she now knows that she can love others because she is loved by God and True Parents, and that having a family would be the culmination of that love.

Another third-year participant, spoke of his realization that he would rather follow True Parents’ example, the true way, and fail than follow a false standard of happiness and succeed, and that this principle will guide him during the rest of his life.

As the time finally came to give out the diplomas, the staff lined up to receive the new graduates and share with each one why he or she is special and how he or she had grown during the year—a deeply moving and tearful moment for everyone. The graduation then concluded with a victory cake, a closing song by the graduates, friends and family, followed by cheers of “Eok mansei!”



The GPA staff have recognized the participants this year as being especially open to receiving new experiences with God and True Parents and eagerly tackling every task they faced. The staff would like to say, one last time, that it has been a pleasure and a privilege to work with all the now-graduates, and they are looking forward to continuously improving the program for next year. They are excited to welcome a new year of growth and discovery, and have extended the deadline for GPA 2014-2015 applications until July 15.

Congratulations to all the GPA graduates! We welcome you home to your communities around the nation and wish you the best of luck in your future!