

Generation Peace Academy Traces True Parents' Footsteps on Mini-Pilgrimage

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Generation Peace Academy (GPA) participants recently spent three days touring New York and Washington, D.C., learning about the history of the Unification Church in the United States. The young Unificationists were greeted by older members who had walked side by side with True Parents back in the formative years of the Unification Movement in America.

The mini-tour was inspired by a similar tour in Korea two years earlier. The GPA staff put together an East Coast tour of key places and significant events relating to the growth of the Unification Church in this country. They hoped that the experience would help GPA participants connect to True Parents and the 40-year foundation they set in the United States.



New York

At the Unification Theological Seminary in Barrytown, John Raucci, a local Unificationist of the Red Hook community, recalled how True Father spent time with the seminary students fishing, making fish nets, and speaking with them. Miho Panzer, another local Unificationist, cared for Rev. and Mrs. Moon's family for over 10 years, and she testified to True Parents' attitude when True Father was preparing to go to Danbury prison in July 1984. She spoke of his strong will, discipline, and how he was totally consumed by the need to fulfill God's Will. Many listeners shed tears while hearing about True Mother's suffering during the Danbury course, and her children's experience during that time. Participants said afterward that the testimonies helped them to gain a "personal image" of True Parents, and inspired them with a "desire to connect and make True Parents more a part of my life, and to share it with others."



The next stop was East Garden, in the small town of Irvington. True Parents and their family spent a great deal of time at this location when they were in America. Staff members who have taken care of Rev. Moon's family for over 40 years—Mike Chapman, Erwin Wachna, Takae Shimizu and Hamako Miyake—gave the participants a tour of the grounds, the old stone house and the new house, and the Holy Rock. All the while they shared stories and memories about the events that occurred in each location and their personal experiences with True Parents and their children.

It was a memorable experience for the GPA members, who gained great insight about True Parents from the personal testimonies and anecdotes. Some realized that, with True Father in the spirit world, the closest they ever will get to knowing him will be through the experiences that others had with him. This perspective made each testimony that much more valuable.



Nearby at Belvedere, a training center for early Unificationists studying the Divine Principle, the core text of the Unification Church, Paul Fontaine, a longtime staff member at East Garden, acted as a guide to the late Hyo Jin Moon's music studio, Father's Rock, Mother's Rock, the Training Center and the Agora House. He also recounted stories about workshops, events and personal moments with True Parents. The GPA staff expressed their gratitude to Mr. and Mrs. Michael McDevitt for a wonderful stay at East Garden and Belvedere before heading to New York City for a tour of the New Yorker Hotel and the Manhattan Center.

While visiting the New Yorker Hotel, GPA participants had lunch with FFWPU USA Continental Director Dr. Ki Hoon Kim, President Dr. Michael Balcomb and CFO Dr. Michael Jenkins, who shared True Mother's vision for America and the role young people will play within that vision. Dr. Balcomb also spoke about the upcoming 43-day God's Hope for America revival road trip, which will trace True Father's steps in establishing 55 Holy Grounds in the United States. One GPA staff member commented, "Our small three-day pilgrimage was a great teaser for the 43-day pilgrimage."

Joe Kinney, a chief engineer at the New Yorker Hotel and New Jersey Unificationist, provided a detailed presentation on the history of the hotel and shared the vision that True Father had for establishing a foothold in the United States through the hotel. The Manhattan Center, which is right next to the hotel, played a significant role in that vision as well, as Manhattan Center staff members explained. During their visit, GPA participants saw the recording studios, video studios and concert venues, and learned about True Father's vision to influence the media in a heavenly manner. The staff also talked about Hyo Jin Moon's role in creating the recording studios, which are still in use today by prominent artists, and played some of Hyo Jin Moon's music which had been recorded there.



Washington, D.C.

The mini-pilgrimage next took them to Washington, D.C., where participants talked with Mr. Tom McDevitt, a former Washington, D.C., Unificationist pastor and current chairman of The Washington Times board of directors. After a tour of The Times building, the team met up with Unificationist Mike Leone at the Washington Monument, where he told stories of how he helped organize the summer-long campaign that brought 300,000 people to hear True Father speak at the Washington Monument on September 18, 1976.

Matthew Goldberg, a professional D.C. tour guide and a longtime Unificationist, gave the GPA participants a tour of the main sights in Washington. One of the stops was the Korean War Memorial, where participants reflected on the significance of the war, and how the United States' involvement allowed True Father to escape from certain death in a North Korean labor camp. The GPA participants officially concluded their tour with a prayer at the Holy Ground that True Father established on the West Lawn of the U.S. Capitol.

GPA staff and participants described their experiences on the mini-pilgrimage as moving and insightful. "It was a wonderful experience for the GPA participants to be able to speak to and see key individuals who were involved in so many historic events," said one of the staff. GPA participants expressed how different the times were in the early days of the Unification Church, when so much was at stake and True Father was so involved, powerful and charismatic. Many of the young people wished the pilgrimage could have been longer and found a new understanding of their own role in God's providence. One participant said they "felt the value and responsibility of being a Unificationist-born youth and how much opportunity we have."

Though the GPA pilgrimage lasted only three days, it was a precious experience for all involved. The staff and participants look forward to the 43-day God's Hope for America road trip, and hope that everyone can participate in some way to be able to connect in a similar way to True Parents and the great foundation that was invested in the United States.