

A Testimony of GPA's Community Outreach

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Seventeen, that's the number of people we had altogether in our group for Community Outreach. These past several weeks we've spent in Columbus, Ohio, with the Ohio Church Community have been eventful. Coming in, we had a lot of hopes and expectations for what we thought the experience would be like.

In the beginning, Keimi, a staff member of Generation Peace Academy (GPA) who has been leading and supervising us, told us that our purpose in Community Outreach was to be able to contribute back to our own community. We all had the chance to learn more about the church, ministry, and gain leadership skills as well. She also gave a talk on goal-setting, stressing the significance of being clear with our goals to help measure our growth and progress. Since we decide what success is, being honest and true to ourselves helps immensely. This helped us set our internal goals for the next 21 days on what we wanted to gain from this experience.



The Ohio community nicely invited us to a welcome BBQ at the place where we were staying. We felt so much love from them, knowing that they hadn't even met most of us yet but still had the heart to serve us.

We all felt that they had welcomed us so sweetly, the least we could do was give back out of the kindness of our hearts.

In addition, we were introduced to the four different kinds of ministries that we could be part of. One of the ministries was for Young Adults, led by young adult pastors Noah and Daniel. They led and participated in events aimed at involving college-aged people in the church. Some of the events they organized were Life Lounge and Junction—events for young adults at which we have the opportunity to discuss different topics and how they relate to our own life. They also connected with the older youth in the church by playing sports or just socializing. Sujin, a first-year GPA participant, spoke about how inspired she was working in this ministry: “Community Outreach was challenging in how it tests how much faith you should have in God in everyday situations. It helps us apply what we learned in GPA, so that we can bring back what we learned to our communities and everyday life. In Young Adult Ministry, we planned events and witnessed. I learned that leadership is a hard thing to have in community, so I was inspired by Noah and Dan in how much thought they put into each decision they made. Now, I want to go back to my community to give back in the same way that Noah and Dan give to theirs.”



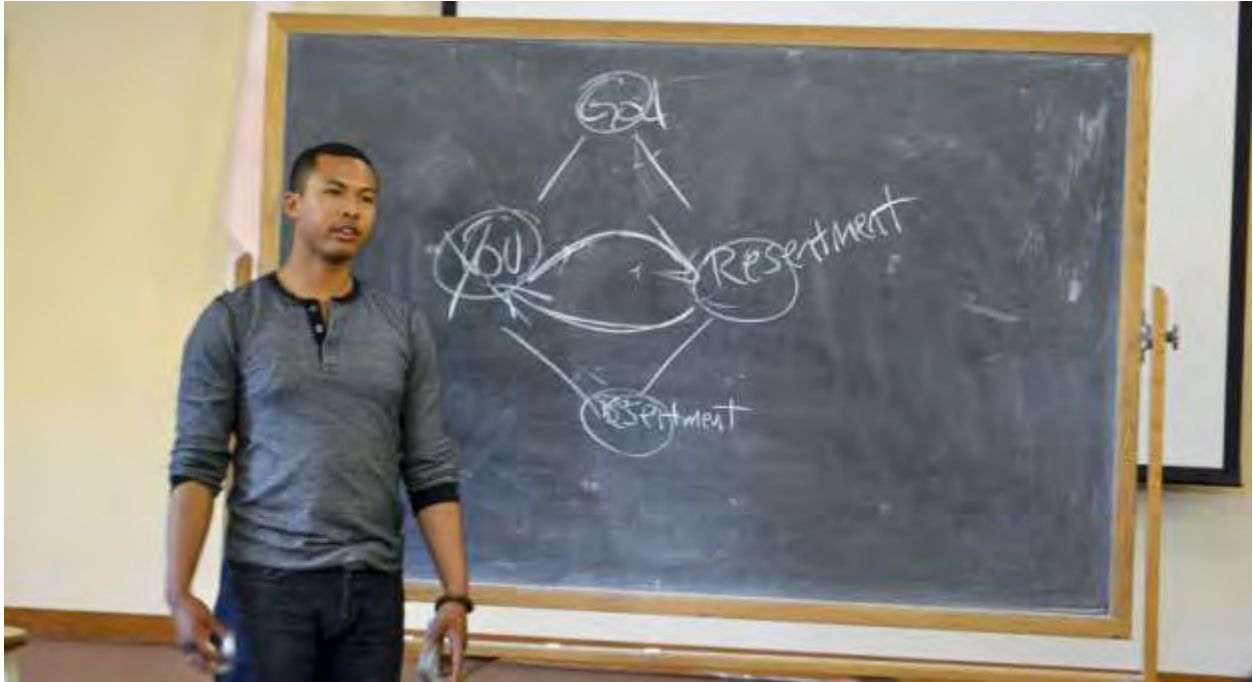
The next choice was the Youth Ministry, led by Youth Ministry Pastor Kwonji. The target audience was middle-schoolers and high-schoolers. We participated in and organized different activities such as Tuesdays with Jordan and BC Bash. These were events at which we could play games and spend quality time with the younger kids. People who wanted to lead these kids needed to have a heart for interacting and loving kids. It helped us learn how we can help the youth back at our own church. Soshun, a first-year participant, talked about organizing the activities and how not everything goes to plan: “Every time we plan activities, something happens and we’re off schedule. Also, because not everything goes to plan, you need a lot of patience. Even though we have everything organized, that’s not what’s important. What’s important is what you want to give to the kids. Whether it be for them to have fun or to gain something valuable, it’s the heart that counts.”

Lastly, we had the Pastoral Ministry led by David, the church’s associate pastor. Takafumi, a first-year participant, talked about his experience of working on his spiritual growth: “In the beginning of Pastoral, I was able to sense God a lot. I encountered my fears and failures I’ve had in the past of loneliness and not being good enough. I didn’t even recognize that I can see God through that. David wanted us to feel God, so I learned that God had accepted me, no matter what my past failures are. I learned to accept myself through that.”

We also had the opportunity to go witnessing on the Ohio State University Campus. We were inviting people to Junction, but it also was a way for us to connect to different people and gain valuable life lessons. Witnessing in pairs, we had internal goals of what we wanted to accomplish and how to love the people with a sincere heart.

As a group, we also did Mother’s Day fundraising for three days to help support our stay in this community. We had the chance to experience what flower fundraising was like and how different it was from our other GPA fundraising conditions that we had done throughout the year. We also had

meaningful experiences in how we could connect it back to God and True Parents.



As GPA, one of our first chances to serve another person was when we helped David's aunt move out of her old apartment into a new house. We didn't want to let it go to waste, because we wanted to serve other people before ourselves! Also, almost every morning for our activities at the church, we did different forms of public speaking, such as debates and DP Study, to help us become more confident standing in front of an audience. David also took the time to give us several leadership talks, telling us how we need to be more present in our lives.

Each day we all had the opportunity to take more ownership, whether it was doing Hoon Dok Hae or suggesting leisure activities, such as going bowling, seeing a movie, or visiting Cedar Point amusement park. This outreach period was also a way for us to take responsibility and leadership over our lives of faith. Overall, these experiences have helped us prepare for our life back home after GPA.



David's brother Ethan, a GPA alumnus, said: "It's nice to have people that can work. GPA has helped with their time, effort and ideas in creating and building a better youth program for the kids that they can feel welcomed to."

