

Generation Peace Academy pilgrimage to places from True Parents' time in USA

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For the past three years, Generation Peace Academy (GPA) has embarked on a pilgrimage of foundational places from True Parents' time in America in order to learn about and connect with True Parents' course and investment in the United States. The pilgrimage was first organized by contacting veteran Unificationists who had walked side by side with our True Parents through such historic events as the Washington Monument and Yankee Stadium rallies. The same elders have helped create such impactful institutions as the Washington Times, Unification Theological Seminary, and many others. Some of the highlights of this annual pilgrimage include a visit to True Parents' home at East Garden in Tarrytown, NY and testimonies from faithful Unificationists who worked close at hand with True Parents.

The pilgrimage began this year by visiting the Unification Theological Seminary (UTS) in Barrytown, NY. There, GPA participants heard testimonies from UTS alumni about the many hours True Parents spent fishing, making nets, and educating seminarians about the significance of their work in America. Current and former UTS presidents, Dr. Hugh Spurgin and Dr. Tyler Hendricks, as well as other alumni, shared intimately about True Father's many visits and their personal experiences.



The second day of the pilgrimage was also spent at UTS. GPA was able to go fishing at some of the same spots where True Father used to fish with the seminarians, which many noted as being a highlight of the UTS portion of the pilgrimage. Through fishing, the GPA participants could feel what it was like to be at UTS when True Parents were there, interacting regularly with students and faculty on a very personal level. Sarah Jackson, a first-year participant from Texas, shared a moving, tearful experience about how, when fishing, she imagined True Father being right there with her.



The highlight of the whole three-day pilgrimage happened on the final day of the trip: GPA arrived early in the morning at the East Garden estate in Tarrytown, NY to say farewell to our True Mother as she departed for her next destination. True Mother greeted the GPA participants warmly and took a beautiful photo with the group. Roland Platt, the director of GPA, noted that this was the first time in history that participants of either GPA or its predecessor, Special Task Force (STF), had taken a personal photo directly with our True Parents! This was truly the culminating experience of the entire pilgrimage for the GPA participants.



The latter part of the third day was spent touring the Manhattan Center and New Yorker Hotel in New York City, two of True Parents' most iconic businesses in the United States. Here GPA participants were given tours of the historic Hammerstein and Grand Ballrooms from former executive vice president and former general manager of Manhattan Center, Louise and Steve Honey, respectively. They were able to learn how the New Yorker was formerly the location of the World Mission Center, where True Parents centralized all of the Unification movements' work globally.



The tour also included a visit to the Manhattan Center recording studios, restored and built under the direction of Hyo Jin Moon, True Parents' eldest son, and used to create music to inspire young people about True Parents' dedication and work. Hiroshi Suzuki, who worked alongside Hyo Jin Moon for many years, shared moving anecdotes about his time spent working as a musician in the studios with Mr. Moon.



During lunch, GPA met with Dr. Michael Balcomb, President of Family Federation for World Peace and Unification (FFWPU) USA, Dr. Michael Jenkins, Chief Financial Officer of FFWPU USA, and other members of the National Ministry Team. This was a wonderful opportunity for the GPA participants to

interact with the National Ministry Team and to hear firsthand about their personal experiences with True Parents.



GPA concluded this year's pilgrimage with a visit to the former headquarters of the National Ministry Team in America and heard testimonies from stalwart Unificationists, Taj Hamad, Jonathan Gullery, and David Eaton, who each shared about how God's hand was with them from the very beginning in their work at the United Nations, and through home church and performing arts missions, respectively.

The pilgrimage was a gateway to help GPA participants put into perspective what it was like to be around True Parents. Through sharing their personal experiences throughout the pilgrimage, veteran Unifications helped the Unificationist-born youth on GPA better appreciate the foundation of sincerity and hard work True Parents have invested in bringing America back to God. With this newfound appreciation, many of the participants commented that they felt their experiences of the whole year on GPA to have culminated in their heartfelt encounter with True Mother on the final day of the pilgrimage.

