

GPA's Peru team shares an about their third week in country

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February 28

Fruit fundraising! Today we were excited to try something new. Tolik-hyung told us about how almost every year, the Generation Peace Academy (GPA) team that traveled to Peru would go ask for donations of fruit at a local marketplace for the homeless or a different non-profit organization. This year we were collecting fruit for a senior citizens' home.

When we arrived at the market, Tolik-hyung told us that last year's Peru team raised enough fruit in one hour. We were determined to beat last year's record but at the same time we wanted to have a good time. We separated into different groups and went down each aisle to ask for fruit donations from the owners of the shops. Every single person donated. It was amazing to see the hearts of the Peruvian people. They just wanted to give and support the elderly. Some people were really touched and gave whole boxes of fruits to us. We received many different fruits, some we've never seen before. After 45 minutes passed we had collected more than enough. We couldn't fit anymore in our van. It was nice to see all our investment come together.

Once we returned back to the Lima church, we started sorting out the fruit. Only the highest quality fruit would go to the senior citizens' home. As we separated the fruits, we munched on many of the fruits that were still of good quality. After finishing sorting the fruits, we had a nice lunch and the brothers from the Lima church played traditional instruments for us. It suddenly became an entertainment day. Tito Omar also played the guitar. We finished lunch and had song practice before we went to travel to the senior citizen home. As we arrived at the home, many of the senior citizens there greeted us happily and they surrounded us.... The spirit there really rose and it felt as if we GPAers were bringing a bright light. We sang for the senior citizens and they clapped enthusiastically and really enjoyed our songs for them.

We had quite a lot of time to interact with them. As I talked with a few of them, one question I always asked was, "Do you enjoy being here?" They always replied no. Some haven't seen their family members for years. One grandpa was talking about how beautiful his granddaughter was and we asked him to show us a picture of her. He replied that he doesn't have photos of his family. It was sad to see and hear these elders' stories. Some had stayed for 10 years or more in that place. We could see how wrong it is to treat family members that once took care of you in this way. Family is really the key to having a better society and a better world. As we were leaving, many of them didn't want us to leave and wanted to keep speaking to us. It was sad to go but we felt we had brightened up their day, at least. Tomorrow we will leave Lima to go to Puno! Buenas noches!

March 4

Buenos dias! Today will be the last day we witness in Peru. More than ever, we were determined to end this last event with God and have no regrets. Jung Hyo gave the morning service on witnessing and tried to express God's heart of love and desperation for all the people that we were going to meet that day.

We went witnessing as teams of three GPA members and three Peruvians. Half of the people from our GPA team were sick but we still went out with hope. As always the Peruvian people really took the time to listen to us. Even though it was quite hot that day, we felt that we were not sweating by ourselves but that God was working hard preparing the people that we were going to meet. As we stood at the entrance of the center waiting for people to come, we started singing. While we were singing, it started to rain. We were scared that people wouldn't come due to the rain, but we didn't let that stop us. We wanted to keep going. As we came to our last two songs, we sang "Country Roads" and "You are My Sunshine." We all separated offering individual prayers to ask for spiritual help. When we finished praying, the rain stopped and our first guests arrived. It wasn't a big group of people, however, we felt as if God was watching our backs and more and more people flowed in.

Pastor Eric from the Dominican Republic gave a lecture on pure love and we could see how each person who has given lectures during our stay has poured their whole being into it. Not even once have the lectures been the same: each individual invested their unique heart in creating and delivering their message. After Eric-hyung's talk, Kyosei and Tsugu gave testimonies about how the practice of pure love has been valuable in their lives. Many guests were moved and some even cried. After the whole event was over, people came up to us asking how their family could be more like us and asked for a lot of guidance. We felt as if we could offer God's hope to these people and make a big difference in their lives. Overall the last day of witnessing was amazing!

March 5

Today was our final day in Puno. We couldn't believe how the time flew by so quickly. We went into the Peruvian church center there and were warmly welcomed by the Unificationist pastor and the rest of the community members that we had yet to meet. We could feel all of their love and attention. As we listened to Mr. Robinson's morning service, we could see how much love and devotion the Peruvians have for God and True Parents....After the service, we were asked to go to the stage to introduce ourselves. But as a surprise we prepared two songs to show our love and appreciation for all the things they had offered to us. We sang "By Your Side" and "Country Roads" in Spanish. They clapped along with us and sang as well.

We could see that we had touched their hearts and moved them. Some of the congregant yelled out that we shouldn't forget that Peru is our second home. Even after we finished singing, the students of the local Collegiate Association for the Research of Principles (CARP) chapter sang two songs for us. The last song they sang was "The Principle Youth March," and we all sang along. It was an amazing performance.

Right after the songs, they gave a small present for us to remember them by. We had a wonderful, filling lunch and a lot of quality time with the community. We had to say goodbye to most of the older Peruvian Unificationists but the other second-generation youth and CARP members we were going see later for sports. After service, we had time to explore the Puno market and there were many extravagant and inexpensive cultural items....

After we finished buying gifts for family and friends, we made one more stop. We stopped at the future Puno church center based on the Unificationist symbol of the twelve gates. We saw how much devotion that previous Special Task Force (STF) and GPA teams had invested to lay the foundation and build the first floor. The dream goal for that church is to build seven floors and establish a Unification community around it. Each floor will have a different and meaningful purpose. We saw how much hope they have for this building to help grow their community, even though it will take a lot of time to build it due to lack of materials and money. We learned that the Family Federation (FFWPU) continental director for South America has even reported the making of the building to True Mother. Hopefully, True Mother will support this project to progress. As we finished looking around, we offered a prayer for the building to be built and for the Peruvian community's hope to never diminish.

Afterwards, we went back to our hotel to get ready to play sports. When we arrived at the park there were already so many people playing different sports such as basketball, volleyball, and soccer. We split into two groups with some wanting to play volleyball and the rest wanting to play basketball. When everyone was done playing volleyball, we decided to play a five-on-five game of basketball against our Peruvian peers. It was amazing to see how they could move freely and we admired how good their lungs were due to the fact that they live in these high-altitude areas. Despite having weaker lungs and breathing profusely, though, GPA was able to win the game 9-1. It was a really exciting game and we were all so exhausted afterwards. As we headed back to the hotel, we all talked about how fun the game was and how we wanted to play more basketball at our next stop.

We had our last dinner at the hotel and we packed up to leave. When we arrived at the bus terminal, the CARP students were already there to say goodbye. It was sad saying goodbye to them and we took many selfies together. We felt we were able to make a difference in their hearts as much as they had moved ours. They also gave us friendship bracelets to never forget. We were disappointed that we had to leave but at the same time, we also wanted to make a huge difference in the next place we were going to. Goodbye, Puno! We will miss you! The next time we wake up, we'll be in Cusco!

March 6

Today we got up at 5:00 a.m. as we arrived in Cusco! Everybody looked tired on the bus but when we stepped out we were amazed by how close we were to the mountains and how the clouds seemed so close to us that we could touch them. On some of the mountains we could even see snow.

As our drivers arrived, we all headed to a local Catholic school. We slept a bit more there and gratefully ate a breakfast prepared by the children from the school. All the kids knew how to cook really well! After breakfast, we headed out to Cusco to explore. The whole town looked as if it was from a fairytale. There were many tourists looking around all the historic sites. So many stores filled with different accessories or foods. There were also a lot of aggressive street salespeople. Some were hardcore but mainly they were all friendly and charismatic people. There was this one small girl selling accessories and she approached us. After we bought some things from her, she went into a restaurant and started approaching people at the tables. It was amazing to see how other people fundraise just like us.

As we continued walking around we found some American food places such as McDonald's, Starbucks, and KFC! It was something we yearned for: to taste food that would remind us of home. Many of us went into McDonald's and bought McFlurries or burgers. It felt so nice to eat these things after quite a while. We had lunch and viewed quite a few places. We also saw alpacas and everybody had a chance to feed and pet some of them. The fur was extraordinarily soft and smooth. Sometimes when a person took a selfie with an alpaca, the alpaca would kiss that person.

At the middle of the city, there was kind of a festival happening. People were singing and dancing. As we continued to look around, we saw some of the locals playing instruments. We admired the beautiful tunes that came out of each and every instrument. As we finished our tour around the city, we started heading back to the school. When we arrived, we had dinner which was a delicious chicken and potato soup. We thought that that was the main dish but then came the salad, chicken, and rice. It's amazing how the Peruvian heart is to just keep giving and serving without wanting to receive anything in return. All they want from us is to see us happy and enjoy their culture. When we finished dinner, we had free time to reflect or complete responsibilities. We then closed the night knowing that the next morning we had to wake up early since we were traveling to Machu Picchu, one of the seven wonders of the world! Buenas noches, and see you tomorrow, Machu Picchu!

March 7

Good morning to all! We woke up at 4:00 a.m. to start getting ready to head to Machu Picchu! We had quite a long bus ride to reach the train terminal so everybody went to sleep. When we arrived at the terminal, we all started to look around to buy snacks or any keychains to bring back home, but everything was quite expensive. Realizing that Machu Picchu was a popular tourist attraction, we all decided just to wait until later to find something.

We all got on the train and it departed. We went through a few tunnels and even the jungle! On the way, we talked about how Machu Picchu was discovered in 1911. We were filled with excitement as we drew even closer to Machu Picchu. As we were going up the mountain we were all ecstatic and saw how beautiful the scenery was, looking down from the mountain. When we arrived at the top, we saw many tourists with their tour guides walking around. The impressive thing was how these tour guides could speak many different languages such as Chinese, Russian, Japanese, and more. As our tour guide showed us around, we were amazed to learn that the Incas were a civilization advanced for their time and how they had built their city. It had taken 750 years to build. The reason why they built the city in that area was because the mountain nearby provided fresh spring water straight to the city. Also, the way they designed the city was amazing. Everything was perfectly planned. They didn't need to leave the city for anything. All their agriculture and farming was done inside the city. Three thousand different types of potatoes were produced as well as many other vegetables. For instance, there is a plant called tawy and it's actually poisonous. But the Incas found a way to extract a lot vitamins and minerals from the plant. The Incas even developed a building that was like a greenhouse. According to the tour guide, they grew enough not only for themselves but to feed the whole of Spain.

Since there was no telling what time was it, the Incas made the sun stone. Another thing that the Incas designed is the sun gate. When the sun shines through the sun gate and hits the sun dial, it would tell the Incas when to harvest their crops. Even the local enemies that tried to invade the city failed due to the way the walls was built. The walls were never breached until the Spanish invaded. The guide told us that

in 1576 the Incan empire collapsed. Despite having went through destruction and the empire collapsing, to this day many of the descendants of the Incas still live as their ancestors did. There are still many secrets yet to be discovered. We could see how God had led this country and wanted to work through its people.

Before heading back home, we had time to do even more shopping, and this time we were able to find good deals. As we headed back home, we talked about how God really blessed the Incan people and how beautiful Machu Picchu is. We felt blessed to visit one of the seven wonders of the world. By the time we reached the school, dinner was prepared and we enjoyed some delicious Peruvian pasta. It kind of had an Asian taste to it. After dinner, we had free time and the brothers played basketball. As we played, the Peruvian students came to play with us and it became a full court basketball game! GPA had to keep switching people because we were all out of breath. Even though we kept subbing, the Peruvian kids kept playing and didn't look as exhausted as we were. In the end, GPA won 19-10. It was an amazing game and they left. The day closed early and we wanted to say our gratitude points for God and True Parents for the events of the day and for allowing us to have such beautiful weather. Especially since this might be a once in a lifetime experience. As we went to sleep, we started looking forward to the next day, when we were going to visit the agriculture village named PISAQ. Ciao! See you tomorrow!

March 8

Today we are going to visit PISAQ, a place where we will learn about how the Incas harvested their vegetables. In part of PISAQ there is an area called Andenes. It looks like big stairs. Every level of this was used to produce different crops. Depending on the height and temperature in these terraces, they could produce different species of vegetation. There was not much flat ground on which they could live or plant things, so they adapted to these mountainous areas by creating their own. The Peruvian people also have many farmlands in the valleys between the mountains, so they made an irrigation system on the mountains by digging up water channels to direct the rain down into the farms.

As we kept traveling, we saw a waterfall next to the mountains. In these mountains, there were many holes. Inside these holes, scientists discovered mummies. We climbed up the mountain QALLAQASA which is 10,000 feet high. After visiting this place, we had lunch at a nice Italian place. We had spaghetti and vegetable soup. When we finished eating, we went to Chinchero. At first, by the look of it, there was nothing to do. As we walked around, we saw a church and went inside. Entering the building was really interesting. It felt as if there was a huge presence around us, and we felt as if there was something pushing our body. It was a weird feeling. What was even more interesting was the pictures that were drawn on all the walls of the church, and how images and sculptures of Jesus and many other saints were everywhere. I sat down to pray, really happy to see how much the people loved Jesus and how devoted to him they were. At the same time, however, I felt that I wanted them to really know True Parents; I wanted them to feel how much of a difference True Parents could make in their lives.

As we left the church, the view was even more magnificent than before. We all started running to explore different places, valleys, streams, and different mountains. It felt really refreshing and many of the GPAers could agree that the atmosphere and the light presence was better than Machu Picchu! Time flew by, and we sadly had to depart. Before we left, we offered EOK MANSEIS for Peru, Chinchero, our GPA Peru team, God and True Parents. Thank you, God, for everything we experienced today. We will share more with you guys tomorrow!