

Religious Youth Service in St. Lucia

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On August 2nd, a group of seven American young people arrived in St. Lucia, having left behind their comfortable lives in the U.S., and ready to embrace the simple way of life in the small fisherman village of Anse-la-Raye. Together with 10 St. Lucians, they participated in the Religious Youth Service (RYS) Project - an experiential leadership program sponsored by the Universal Peace Federation (UPF).



The group stayed at the Anse-la-Raye Primary School where accommodations were very humble. Here we lacked the usual conveniences of computer with immediate access to the internet and facebook, and radios. Benita, a seventeen year old U.S. participant said: "It taught me a lot to appreciate my family and the country I live in".

The first two days of the RYS program were dedicated to orientation during which the participants could learn more about each other, through activities focused toward building trust and respect. Creating an atmosphere of openness greatly encouraged the volunteers sharing.

The service aspect of the project took the form of painting 13 houses belonging to senior citizens and disabled persons who could not otherwise afford the renovations and repairs. The participants also gave a beautiful facelift to the Catholic Parish Hall that is currently used as a community center. Young persons from the village also joined in to help with the painting. It was so rewarding to feel the appreciation of the villagers smiling as they passed by.



Through the collective labor the volunteers had a great deal of fun and experienced deep satisfaction in working together. When you sweat in the heat side by side, caring for others together as one you can oftentimes appreciate the best in each other quickly becoming good friends. In this way, the project was a precious and unforgettable experience.

In the afternoons, the participants went to the beach or frolicked in the river waterfalls, thus enjoying the rich landscape of St. Lucia. They also had the opportunity to visit Castries, the capital city, and to buy souvenirs there. During the “Anse-la-Raye Friday Fish Night”, they celebrated and explored the local culture. And one afternoon, they had the opportunity to showcase their talents to the villagers at a youth talent show titled “Positive Vibes.”

On Sunday, they went to the Anse-la-Raye Catholic Church where they sang a song together to embrace the congregation. This was a wonderful experience for everyone. For some U.S. participants it was actually their very first attendance at a Catholic Mass.

Dr. Rosemarie Mathurin, Ambassador for Peace (current St. Lucia Speaker of the House), surprised the participants by her visit and she challenged them to become responsible leaders in their communities including in the political field.

Though the participants were from many different races, cultures or religions, the RYS project served to bring them all together like one family under God. In this way, they could taste a bit of the Kingdom of Heaven on earth.



Rev. Moon created the Religious Youth Service 27 years ago to teach young leaders of different religions, races, and cultures to work together to build "One Family under God." It is one thing to image such a possibility and another to authentically practice it. Because these young people could experience it in the Anse-la-Raye RYS project, they now truly realize that it is possible to accomplish it on a global level - to build a better world that fully welcomes and involves God.

I wish that many young people could have such an experience.



