

CARP “Refresh” Handles Hot Topics - Victoria Roomet

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Participants of the CARP retreat gather together for a group photo outside the Alhambra Renaissance Theatre after church on Sunday, June 24.

Approximately 85 first- and second-generation Unificationists gathered for The Collegiate Association for the Research of Principles (CARP) America’s first, annual “Refresh Retreat” titled “Live Life on Purpose,” from June 19-24, 2012 at the Angeles Crest Christian Camp in La Canada, CA.

Wendy Fiala, secretary of CARP America, said, “We at headquarters chose the title ‘Live Life on Purpose’ because we want to support college students by helping them see how the Unificationist perspective can be a resource in finding their unique life purpose. We want college students to understand that our goal as CARP, the college-aged branch of the Unification movement, is not necessarily about creating Unificationists, but to help our college-aged population become stronger in their own expression of faith.”

According to CARP America’s website, carplife.org, the retreat was organized for college-aged Unificationists with the hope that they come away “with a deeper understanding of what the Unification Perspective has to offer, a clearer sense of personal values and beliefs, as well as some great memories.”

A raft of speakers were invited to address college-related topics such as atheism, gay rights, intolerance and relationships: Rev. Kevin Thompson, district pastor of District 11 (Northern California and Northern Nevada), Heather Thalheimer, director of education at Lovin' Life Ministries, Rev. Phillip Schanker, head of the BlessedLIFE Ministry, Pastor Demian Dunkley, Lovin Life Pastor in Las Vegas, Debbie Gullery, BlessedLIFE director of counseling and co-director of education, David and Kendra Stein, a second-generation Unificationist couple with three children, Jaga Gavin, national youth pastor, and Victoria Roomet, president of CARP America.



Maryam and Layla Zomorod try their hand at archery during the activities and networking time.

Ester Allen (21), a second-generation Unificationist from New York, described the presentation content as “Amazing. Each presentation was given by a different speaker, which was cool because then they could talk about what they believed and knew best.

“Everyone was really blown away by the content, which is kind of incredible because the retreat wasn’t content-heavy. Everything was presented in a way that wasn’t forced upon us. Its purpose was to get us thinking about our own beliefs and to share the Unification Perspective on topics that come up a lot to college students.”

Monika Rotondo (22), a second-generation Unificationist from Irvington, AL said: “The retreat was

amazing. We got to have a vacation and meet other young Unificationists. What amazed me most was the many guest speakers who traveled all the way to the mountains in California to come share their experiences and wisdom with us. I could really see how much they care about us and want us to be the best we can be to change this world. They were happy to answer our tough questions to the best of their abilities, without judgment in their heart. I can't express how much I appreciated that. I was incredibly happy I went to the retreat and wished everyone could have been there!"



On the last night of Refresh, the participants gathered in the camp's amphitheater for an open mic.

One thing that stood out to many participants, according to Fiala, was Rev. Schanker's presentation on hot-topics in colleges. "Rev. Schanker conveyed a very powerful message," said Fiala. "He opened the floor to the participants, and they brought up what they were interested in hearing about. He talked about drugs and alcohol and masturbation, as well as the Unification perspective on same-sex attraction. That was very special, because this was content that Rev. Schanker was personally asked to develop by Senior Pastor Rev. In Jin Moon, and this was the first time he presented it. A lot of students had never heard such topics spoken about in a church setting, and the message was really one of non-judgment and support towards those brothers and sisters who experience that."

Naokimi Ushiroda, director of the Lovin' Life Leadership Program and a board member of CARP America, called the content "appropriate and catered towards the target audience. This is the first time CARP has done a retreat, and I felt like the atmosphere, the setting, the way the whole program was set up, was very appropriate for this age group. Especially all the different challenges – emotional, psychological, mental – that young people encounter in school, the chance to relax in a very healthy setting out in nature, with people who share similar values, and to receive some education and testimonies from very experienced speakers, is important. I could see that all of it was valuable to the participants."



Rev. Phillip Schanker, head of BlessedLIFE Ministry, speaks to participants about hot topics on campus.

According to Allen, the participants' diverse backgrounds made for a very engaging atmosphere. "We were all Unificationists, but we were from all over the country, and for some people it was their first time going to anything in ten years," she said. "Some people had never been to a workshop, and there were even three young first-generation Unificationists. Other people who attended had grown up going to workshops and had very traditional parents. So, we really got a diverse set of perspectives."

Presentations were scheduled in the morning and after dinner, which left the entire afternoon open to activities and networking. "In the feedback forms, one of the things a lot of people were grateful for was that huge chunk of time to hang out and get to know people," said Fiala. "We felt like an important part of the experience at Refresh was to meet other Unificationists who are going through similar campus experiences and to continue conversations so that there is a support system upon returning to school."

The retreat ended on Sunday, on the morning of which the participants carpooled to the Alhambra Renaissance Theatre to watch Lovin' Life Ministries Sunday service together with the Los Angeles community. "We got to experience what it's like to see the sermon in a movie-theater church, which was

different and very exciting,” said Allen.



Dave and Kendra Stein share their personal experience as a married Unificationist couple in one of the presentations offered at Refresh.

Ushiroda said Refresh is the first of many annual CARP retreats. “My gut feeling is that the number of applicants for this program will increase dramatically each year,” he said. “I’m looking forward to next year already!”

David Freeland (28), a second-generation Unificationist and Lovin’ Life pastor in the San Francisco area said, “My experience at the retreat was very insightful. There was so much relevant content, and many of my questions concerning current issues were answered. But more than anything, this retreat lived up to its name. I feel refreshed and empowered to be who I am, a proud Unificationist who sees value in being authentic about my identity and values.”