

Generation Peace Academy Graduates First Class - Roland Platt

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The Generation Peace Academy's first and largest class consisted of 163 first-, second- and third-years.

The Generation Peace Academy (GPA), Lovin' Life Ministries' (LLM) premier character-education program for young Unificationists, graduated its first class of trainees with tears and cheers in the Grand Ballroom of the Manhattan Center on June 16, 2012. In addition to the 122 first-year-, 32 second-year- and 9 third-year GPA graduates, approximately 200 family and friends attended the ceremony to enjoy the program of testimonies, performances and fellowship.

The ceremony began at 9:00 a.m. with an invocation from Pastor Andrew Love, the newly appointed Lovin' Life Pastor of New York City, and introductory remarks from Victoria Roomet, president of CARP (Collegiate Association for the Research of Principles).

In an interview with Unificationnews.com, Love shared the following: "While I was giving the invocation and throughout the graduation ceremony, I felt that there was so much heart in the room. Not my heart, but God's heart. I felt that God's heart was optimistic. It's taken us so long to come to where we are now. With GPA, which was developed by Rev. In Jin Moon and True Parents, we finally have a program that helps young Unificationists understand and feel God's heart. These graduates are the first-ever graduates of GPA, and I felt so much joy that was not my own."

Roland Platt, director of GPA, offered congratulatory words, and a moving video titled "Moments of GPA 2011-2012" that reprised the various activities of GPA to the attendees. Heather Thalheimer, the director of education at LLM, then introduced Rev. Joshua Cotter, the vice president of the Unification Church USA, who gave the keynote address (see video).

The graduation ceremony included a performance from the GPA choir, which not only received first place from Rev. and Mrs. Sun Myung Moon at the Second International Unification Church Choir Competition in Korea on January 27, 2012 but also had traveled to Japan to volunteer in tsunami-relief and to speak out against faith breaking from February 6-13, 2012. The choir performed the songs "Daniel Goes to Battle," "Shall We Gather at the River," and "Somebody to Love," which met resounding applause from their audience.

Three GPA-graduates, first-year trainee Josh Hunter (see video), first-year trainee Rebecca Mock (see video) and second-year trainee Michael Bonini (see video) offered poignant testimonies about their

experiences in GPA.

As a finale, GPA trainees from all modules performed three ballroom-dance routines – a Chacha, a Swing and a Foxtrot – choreographed by Ariana Moon to showcase the dance skills gained during the past year. The graduates then received a certificate and with visible tears, closed the ceremony with a song and a prayer.



From left to right: Heather Thalheimer, GPA graduate Felicia Bratti, Rev. Joshua Cotter and Roland Platt.

STF vs. GPA

The GPA program for 2011-2012 was structured in a tripartite-module system which involved a fundraising module, an overseas module and a leadership module. For the fundraising module, participants were divided into small groups and traveled throughout the United States to fundraise and witness in various cities with the purpose of developing an appreciation for the foundation many first-generation Unificationists had built through such activities. For the overseas module, participants raised enough money to finance a trip to a third-world country, usually in Central- or South America, and completed 21 days of public service there, such as renovating and constructing schools, and participating in character-education programs for the local youth. The leadership module, also called the Leadership Program, took place in Manhattan, New York, and provided participants the opportunity to intern at Unification Church USA Headquarters and to develop proficiency in a certain area of ministry, as well as to experience and to inherit the vision and culture of LLM.

GPA, formerly known as the Special Task Force (STF), was renamed and restructured by Rev. In Jin Moon in 2011. In an interview earlier this year, Platt said, “I’ve always felt STF, now GPA, is True Family’s program. STF was launched in 1994, and then in 2001, Hyun Jin Moon took leadership and re-vamped it, exactly seven years after the program was created. Then exactly seven years later, in 2008, Rev. In Jin Moon came and embraced the program, speaking at the Unification Theological Seminary (UTS) almost on the exact day her brother, Hyun Jin Moon, had seven years earlier, in the very same room. I had an incredibly experience that day when I realized this.”

Platt also mentioned that due to an increased interest – nationally and internationally – from prospective applicants for next year’s GPA, the program may change to include a fourth module.

According to Keimi Kanno, who has been the GPA coordinator for three years, adjustments in the STF program began when Rev. In Jin Moon was appointed president of the Unification Church USA in 2009, but the title change from “STF” to “GPA” represented how the program is now different in its entirety.

“STF was the first program in the United States to focus on training second-generation to develop their life of faith,” she explained. “We used to have an international STF headquarters in Korea, and they had specific standards for STF USA, STF Japan, STF Europe, STF Korea, etc., but now there is no active STF headquarters. STF in the United States has been completely reworked into GPA, which is very different from the way STF used to be. STF reflected the course the first-generation had to go through, which involved full-time witnessing and full-time fundraising, but now, thanks to Rev. In Jin Moon, we have a program that is created especially for the needs of the second-generation. Of course, we still have fundraising- and witnessing aspects to the GPA program, but we do it more to understand what our parents and elders had to go through and to appreciate their sacrifices. GPA now focuses on helping young Unificationists respond to their family situations, build a life of faith, understand what LLM is about and realize what True Parents and True Children are trying to do for our movement.

“This year, we had a record number of applicants. We now have more variety of people wanting to participate. Different countries have expressed interest in replicating the GPA for their youth. STF used to be a place where you decided either to commit or not commit to the movement, but now it’s not a matter of deciding. Rather, it’s a matter of how you want to contribute to the movement. So, not only has there been a change in the type of person who comes to GPA, but also the foundation that the second-generation come with nowadays is very different from that in the past. This is thanks to youth-ministry efforts in the local area, which Rev. In Jin Moon promoted a lot. Overall, there is much more support for the second-generation to grow and deepen their life of faith.”

Second-year graduate Kim Dickerson also testified about the difference between the STF- and the current GPA program as experience through her role as a captain. “This year, participants were expected to exercise a higher level of ownership,” she said. “From the start, we stressed the importance of taking charge of what you believe and how you act upon it. As someone who attended one year of STF and this past year of GPA, I could really see how we were trying to create a different culture. We wanted a healthier environment that supported growth. We wanted brothers and sisters to be more encouraging and inclusive of each other. Having been a part of both programs, I could see the conscious choice of second-years, third-years and staff to make the atmosphere better. We wanted to be clear, with the name change from STF to GPA, about the culture we wanted to create.

“One big difference in the fundraising module was the amount of time per day we fundraised. This year, we had a rule that we don’t fundraise before 7 a.m. or after 11 p.m. There’s more of a stress on safety, especially when driving. The overseas module was more organized and living at the Lovin’ Life Learning Center at 43rd street changed a lot as well. Last year, we still had evening programs at the Learning Center on a weekly basis, but everybody did street-witnessing every afternoon. This year, during the leadership module, or Leadership Program, we got to intern at Unification Church USA Headquarters to decide how we could contribute to Lovin’ Life after GPA. I feel that the skills we gain through the Leadership Program are more applicable to life and more practical than what I experienced in my first year. The Leadership Program is much more like college and therefore, it prepares you for college life. All in all, the direction and culture changed a lot in the past two years through these little and big changes.”



From left to right: Heather Thalheimer, GPA graduate Jonathan Cook, Rev. Joshua Cotter and Roland Platt.

Testimonies from GPA Graduates

First-year graduate Kohta Nishioka: “I was comparing the GPA graduation ceremony to my high school graduation, and honestly, this graduation was a lot more meaningful. I did and learned so much more in this past year than I did during my four years in high school. The main thing I’m grateful for is how this program changed my heart and attitude. GPA isn’t just about teaching us how to grow during the time we are on the program, but also about helping us continue to grow after we leave and further develop our relationship with God and True Parents. I’d like to say thank you to God and True Parents and to Rev. In Jin Moon and her family – especially to Ariana and Jin Sung Park for teaching us ballroom and heart of attendance. Also, when I went to Las Vegas to see True Parents earlier during the year, I felt so much love for him, and I felt as if he were my grandfather.”

First-year graduate Catherine Meyer: “The biggest thing I learned on GPA is that struggle makes you grow. You have to learn how to digest every experience, and even if it’s negative, you learn that you can become stronger, wiser and develop a deeper heart from it. If I had gone to college directly at high school, I would not have matured as much or have been heartistically and mentally prepared for what would come my way.

“Also, I definitely developed a deeper understanding for True Parents. You know, sometimes it sounds clichéd when people say things such as, “True Parents gave me everything” or “I love God and True Parents,” and I never really understand why they said these things or whether they really meant it until now. Now I realize that we wouldn’t have all these GPA commanders we love – such as Klein Gauthier, Akira Watanabe, Kenzo Tanaka, Roland Platt – all the GPA captains and my fellow first-years that care for us so much without True Parents. I finally understand why people say True Parents gave us everything. And without Rev. In Jin Moon, GPA wouldn’t be GPA – she put so much effort into making the program what it is.”

First-year graduate Stephen Galvan: “My experience on GPA was unforgettable, which I know is vague. But it was a very big growth experience. There were a lot of humbling moments, especially in fundraising. This year was insane. I went to Korea, Japan, got to sing for True Parents, helped out with tsunami relief. Also, in terms of character development, I don’t think I could have grown as quickly if I had gone straight to school. It wasn’t always easy, but I learned a lot about myself through it, about selflessness and gratitude, and what it means to really be unified with somebody. True Parents, and what it means to be unified with their goal in life, which is *Cheon Il Guk*. You have to take ownership over what you do, but also try to practice the lifestyle they have.”

First-year graduate Sachie Kawachi: “GPA is now over – but I feel hopeful. Hopeful of all the amazing feats everyone will accomplish, hopeful of the chance we will once again see each other, hopeful of what life will bring each person. This is just the beginning of everything else amazing that is to come. Being a part of this year has not only tested everything I stand for but also shown me a wider and brighter perspective on life. It has taught me to live for a higher being. It has taught me the value of having a relationship with our Heavenly Parent. I have learned far more than I could have imagined.

“I realized that when you live your life with gratitude, everything becomes bearable and you know that your Heavenly Parent is working in your life. Gratitude makes life a brighter place. I know that soon life will not be easy the way it was on GPA, where we didn’t have to worry about what we had to eat, where we were constantly smothered in love by our fellow first years, second years, third years and core staff, but now I hope to gradually get involved in my community by offering it unconditional support – in little and big ways -- finding the balance between school and a life of faith.

“There is so much to be grateful for. Even though this year was tough, I realize that there is nothing that can replace the experience of it and all the incredible people that have been a part of it. Thank you, all of you second-years and third-years. Thank you, core staff. Thank you, mama, papa, Kenta and Liay. Thank you, Rev. In Jin Moon and Jin Sung Park. Thank you, True Family. Thank you, Ariana and Uncle Doug. Most of all, Thank you, Heavenly Father and True Parents. It was an honor and privilege to have been a part of this year with you.”

First-year graduate Josh Hunter: “Finishing GPA feels so unreal – I feel like I just woke up from a dream. GPA has been one of the hardest things I've ever done, but I wouldn't trade my experience during this year for anything. I've learned so much about my character; I saw my weaknesses and strengths and was able to work on them. I've learned that cultivating my life of faith is a personal responsibility and that my relationship with God and True Parents is something unique. Also, I've realized how deep and unconditional God, True Parents and True Family's love is for me – something I will never let myself forget.

“In going back to my community, I will be a John the Baptist for Rev. In Jin Moon and True Family. Experiencing her love and investment through my whole GPA year and time spent with her family has really shown me the vision she has for the future of our movement. I now see how it is so important that we unite with her and support whatever it is that she needs us to support.

“I plan on teaching my community ballroom dance. It is something that has brought me so much joy and has helped me grow my sincerity and respect towards my sisters. Also it’s a way in which Rev In Jin Moon wants to love our youth and at the same time help raise the standard of our brother/sister relationships. I fully want to support and convey this to my community. Also, the experiences I have shared with True Family, lessons I've learned overseas and fundraising are all things I want to share.”