

GPA Hones Their Skills and Express Gratitude to True Mother

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Generation Peace Academy sent a team of ten participants to Las Vegas to collaborate with the Collegiate Association for the Research of Principles (CARP) Las Vegas in supporting and furthering True Parent's Providence in Las Vegas through witnessing. They will stay there from April 21 to May 31, 2015.

GPA wasted no time. They began activities at the University of Las Vegas in Nevada (UNLV) campus, the same day they arrived, inviting students to attend the weekly "Discussion Night" events hosted by CARP.

"Witnessing is more of a person-to-person, heart-to-heart connection with another person on a deeper level compared to fundraising... it's a different kind of love investment," commented Yuri Shibata, a first-year GPA participant from Chicago, Illinois.

CARP has been hosting the event every week for over a year and has consistently drawn over 30 students per night. Guest speakers have included Katherine Duncan, representative of the City Council Ward 5, and Rev. Kara Keating, the Spiritual Director of Soul Sanctuary LLC and author of spirituality and interfaith books. After hearing a short talk from the guest speaker, the students then break off into smaller groups to discuss and share their thoughts on various themes such as "World Peace Begins with Me" or "Greater Goals for the Greater Good."

"I've participated in many church gatherings where we get together as a church family, but this is the first time where I experienced the same kind of family atmosphere... even though many of the students weren't [Unificationists], they still were able to connect to our principles and core values," remarked Chungbom, a second-year participant from Japan.

The GPA participants have also assisted with several larger activities as well. Recently the team joined in on clean-up projects organized by a UNLV student organization called Shine City Project, and have assisted with the Las Vegas Family Church monthly youth group gathering and an educational seminar about True Parent's Providence in Las Vegas, by Las Vegas Family Church Senior Pastor, Reverend Ken Doo.

Towards the end of the week, GPA, CARP, UPA, and several UNLV students, took some time out from outreach and activities to experience some natural beauty at Red Rock Canyon. The group took in majestic views there, only twenty minutes from the Las Vegas strip, and spent time being able to connect and recharge.

"Before Red Rock, I felt like I was living a life closed-off from others," reflected a first-year GPA participant from Detroit, Michigan. "But lying on the rocks and looking up at the vast blue sky made me

realize that the world was much broader...the beauty of God's creation helped remind me of the important things in life – family”

The day ended with a bonfire, where participants shared their goals and experiences in an intimate and supportive atmosphere. Kobe, a student at UNLV and new CARP member, shared a unique experience,

“Recently, I went with my best friend to celebrate their birthday. After dinner, we took a walk on the strip. It wasn't anything special; however, this time it felt different because I couldn't really enjoy myself. I felt that my spirit and my energy were being drained by seeing what was really happening there. I became very discouraged and began wondering, “How are we ever going to change Las Vegas?” I realized that the best we can do is to win our individual victories. I want to inspire others to do the same. When more and more people begin winning those victories, then Las Vegas can begin to change. I hope we all can do that.”

Kobe's experience sums up the determination of many of the participants, including their love for the city and its people. It has been an enriching experience for GPA members to see the work that the UNLV and CARP students have been doing, and to be able to lend support. The participants and students are sure to learn even more from each other in the weeks to come.

GPA can now add Las Vegas, to their list of meaningful experiences. Participants just wrapped up their second annual GPA/STF reunion in conjunction with its annual Family Workshop at Estes Park, Colorado, before splitting up again and heading off to Las Vegas and other parts of the country. While in Colorado, a few of the first and second year GPA members, took some time to write letters to True Mother expressing their gratitude for what they have gained so far, and their excitement at welcoming her soon in America. A collection of twelve beautiful letters can be read below.



Letters to True Mother

“My experience on GPA has been life-changing. For most of my life I thought that I was set in my life of faith and that I knew everything there was to know about God and True Parents, because I'd been taught the same things over and over again at church and workshops. But after coming to GPA and being challenged every day, fundraising out in the frontlines, I soon realized that the faith that I thought was mine wasn't really mine but my parents'. I just followed everything that they did and never really questioned or rebelled against anything. So when I met people who had a stronger conviction in their faith and what they believed in, I didn't feel confident and wavered a lot.

One constant challenge I struggled with was being vulnerable to God and the people I met. This past competition I worked on facing my challenges, instead of running away like I always did. It was a constant battle that I had to continuously face. I especially had a hard time being more honest and open with the people I met on the frontline. Many times I would say only the minimum and exclude anything that might bring me any more persecution.

But I felt like there was something missing, and I felt like I had to make fundraising more memorable. By being more open and vulnerable to God's children, I was able to have more heartistic connections with them and make more meaningful memories and experiences.

Each day we would read True Father's words on "Total Investment" in the morning, and it stuck with me that True Parents lived every day with total investment. Without you and True Father I wouldn't be alive and wouldn't have gone through all these amazing experiences. Thank you so much for everything." — Elly, California



"Thank you for my life. Thank you for raising me to this day. I am so fortunate to not only be part of just a movement but just being able to be part of returning joy to God and trying to establish a world of peace. My letter is to simply express gratitude and love for you. Throughout my entire life I've been all over, and I've hit high and low points in my relationship with you, True Father, and Heavenly Father. But somehow I was always given chances after chances. Generation Peace Academy was yet another chance for me. I could say with confidence that no matter how much I struggled in my life, I was always taken care of by Heavenly Father. By no doubt I've grown internally so much more than I ever have in my entire life. And that is because for the first time I was genuinely able to understand Heavenly Father's love for me. And that was only possible because you and True Father have shown us the way. You have eased the painful, lost hearts of humankind and liberated God's heart who was finally able to rightfully claim His children.

I know that it is not easy, True Mother. But I just want you to know I'm working hard for you. And I know every time I'm out on the frontline, fundraising or whatever I'm doing, you and True Father are with me. So I'll never be alone. So I want you to know you have all of my support, and of all God's children. I love you so deeply, more than you know. Thank for encouraging us to "Bounce" and care for our well-being. I feel younger every time I do it and unity with you, True Mother." — Junta, New Jersey

"This year on GPA has been full of so many experiences that have shaped my perspective and heart toward God and True Parents. GPA has given me such precious opportunities to develop a relationship and trust in God and True Parents through fundraising, workshops, and overseas service work. I would just like to share a bit of what I experienced here on GPA.

After my first half of the year, I felt like I really started to create a foundation for my relationship with God, but I felt like I did not create any real, deep kind of relationship with True Parents. And thus the second part of this year, the GPA group and I focused on our relationship with True Parents and our heart of attendance toward them. I struggled a lot during the condition before going to the Philippines. I was feeling empty and felt like I couldn't feel any of God's love. I was trying to feel something while fundraising, but I just felt so empty even though I was investing every day.

Then one day I realized that I hadn't focused or thought about True Parents at all, even though they were part of my internal goal. That day I decided to focus on True Parents. I tried imagining them next to me,

talking to them, looking at their picture, and chanting “Chambumonim Okmansei.” From that day I felt a huge turnaround from my confusion and emptiness.

I felt God’s love through True Parents and finally felt this sort of comfort and trust that even if I don’t feel anything that everything will be ok. It was because I have True Parents. And that was my first step in my relationship with True Parents. Ever since that condition, I’ve been taking small steps forward in this relationship through our service work in the Philippines and spring fundraising competition.

I was so inspired about my fresh experience with True Parents that it truly carried me through my time in the Philippines. However, the inspiration didn’t last, and many doubts came about True Parents. I questioned whether this was helping me build my relationship or why I was even doing this for them. Why can’t I just do nothing? The answer was simply because I am a second gen. I was given the most precious gift, and that is to be able to understand God’s heart through True Parents. As much as I don’t like the responsibility that comes with this gift all the time, I know it is what I want to do as a daughter to God and True Parents.

Even though I don’t always feel like my relationship with True Parents is moving forward, I know that this parent-child relationship is what I want now and after GPA. Whether my investment in this relationship can be seen or felt in the present moment, I know it is out there and that relationships can only deepen when we continuously invest every day. And that is the heart I want to develop till the end of this GPA year.” — Erika, Georgia



“Hello!! How are you doing? My name is Nao from Arizona. Currently I am a first year here on GPA. It’s already less than half a year before we graduate. But during that amount of time, I have learned a lot about God, True Parents, and what it means to be a second generation. Before coming to GPA, I didn’t have so much faith or personal relationship with God or True Parents. It was always hard for me to include faith in my life because I was immature, not interested, or I always put other priorities before True Parents.

But during these past conditions, I felt that I was able to understand your heart for us. How much you love and invest in each member in the Unification movement. What really opened my eyes was my fundraising experience and overseas service project. Fundraising helped me see from God’s perspective and broke my concepts. It put me in a position to try loving unconditionally and striving to understand what True Father went through. I can never fully give back for all the sacrifice you have done for us, but I am truly grateful for all of the experiences and memories I was able to gain because I had God and True Parents.

While overseas, I was able to really understand the meaning of living for the sake of others. I was able to embrace the culture and really see that happiness is a life lived for others. I learned many things when I went to the Philippines, from their strong faith they have to their loving family culture. It was a great example to teach us many things that we overlook in America. But of course all of my experience was worth every second, because I was able to include God and True Parents this year.

Thank you for always guiding us throughout this year of GPA. I definitely need to work on creating a more personal relationship with God and True Parents, but for how I just want to thank you for giving me this life. I love you! Thank you for all that you do.” —Nao, Arizona



“Hello! My name is Amy and I’m a first year participant on GPA. I came from the beautiful island where you and Father invested so much into the Ocean Providence, Kodiak!

Thank you so much from the bottom of my heart for being in my life. You’ve been working so hard constantly, and I’m sorry I can’t fully understand it still.

Right now I’m feeling so much love from God, you, True Father and our whole Unification family. I just recently felt a hint of how you and God see hope in our movement.

My brother was fighting against lymphoma for a year and just recently ascended to spirit world. We prepared an amazing, lively, festive Seonghwa, and I never experienced so much love and support from the Unification family. The one thing I saw was how much hope our parents, the first generation, have for second generation to build a relationship with you and through that, understand God’s heart more. That’s why they gave up so many opportunities in their lives to invest 100 percent into building strong relationships and making our families a home for God. Actually experiencing this physically moved my heart and I finally felt the love from the older generation in my heart.

This is why I want to dedicate more time to becoming a better leader and to take ownership for my life of faith as well as to understand that I’m standing here now because of past generations, you, and God.

Thank you so much for letting me share this experience. I want to say that all of GPA is supporting you and we love you. Please take care and see you soon!” — Amy, Alaska

“My name is Aimi Asanuma. I am a first year participant of GPA, and would like to share some of my experiences so far this year. Every day of the past eight months of my life on GPA has been full of new experiences, emotions, and challenges. Through all the fundraising, workshops, and overseas service projects, I’ve learned that a life of faith is a constant battle, but one that is certainly worth fighting for.

I’ve come to recognize that everything I have in my life so far has been given to me by God and True Parents; that I must live my life in gratitude to give back in return for it all. Though it is still easy to forget at times, I can see now that my life is truly a gift. This is why through this year I have come to develop a desire to share all of my victories and challenges with God and True Parents by inviting them into my thoughts and actions. Through this, I feel that I’ve gotten just a small taste of True Parents’ heart in wanting to give back to God.

Inviting God and True Parents into my life has also helped me to practice walking with the confidence of knowing that I come from True Parents, and envisioning them beside me, working in partnership with them. One quote that I always went back to that helped me throughout my fundraising conditions is,

“Wherever you go, you can find Father’s footprints just in front of you.” Having True Parents with me at all times gave me a sense of comfort and security, and I began to develop a child’s heart toward both God and True Parents.

My main purpose in coming to GPA was to develop a more personal parent-child relationship with True Parents and our Heavenly Parent, and though there is much more I have yet to learn, I believe that I have taken the first steps to building that relationship.

I feel so blessed to have met and grown my life of faith with so many beautiful brothers and sisters through this program this year, and would like to thank you sincerely for this amazing opportunity. We truly want to commit ourselves to being your hope for this world, and to continue to grow in our lives of faith closer to you and our Heavenly Parent.” —Aimi, Nebraska



“On this program I’ve come to appreciate having God and True Parents in my life and my respect for you has grown deeply. I’ll try my best to be honest with my story, so please bear with me. In the beginning I was very lost and wondered many times if I needed God and True Parents in my life. During winter competition I finally hit my lowest stage and stopped caring about everything. My mindset was that there’s no hope in humanity, and God felt so distant in my life. Then I had a sharing with my captain. She told me that rather than searching for hope, I should become the hope, just like you told us in one of your speeches: “You who were born with truth must be the light for humanity.” Also she made me realize that God’s always been right next to me, reaching out and supporting me with everything He can. After that sharing, my internal goal changed to “Give Hope with God.”

During the super-challenge condition, my internal goal was to “give God’s love.” This was because the overseas project was in two weeks and I wanted to prepare my heart to give to the people in the Dominican Republic. Because the Dominicans had less than we did, I wanted to share God’s love that I receive in America with the upcoming service projects. With that in mind, I wanted to practice giving God’s unconditional love to the people out there. Through that amazing experience, many times I was able to tap into a higher source of power and hardly felt tired. That was how I experienced God during each of my runs.

After the overseas project, I wanted to give back even more to God for the spring competition, so my internal goal was to “comfort God and True Parents’ heart.” To me that meant to ease their aching heart through the people I met on the front line. Each day I felt more and more discouraged as I kept failing over and over again and started to crash. Then an I.W. named Shiori had a talk with me. She told me that I should change my goal into something I could connect to. The next day I changed my goal to “live for God and True Parents.” This was another way of saying: putting God and True Parents as my center and core of my life. As my action steps: I read God’s words to recenter myself, prayed to see the bigger picture, chanted my internal goal to remember what I’m practicing, and connected back to my core/center to remember my purpose. My runs became more focused, and my reports were clear on whether I practiced my action steps or not.

Through the internal goals and action steps, I was able to grow closer to you, True Father, and God. I'm grateful for all the experiences I've had on GPA and still looking forward to continue growing with the upcoming outreaches and pilgrimages. Most of all, I would like to thank you and True Father for all the investments you put into us 2nd generations, and the love you continually show us today." — Saori, Alaska

"I would like to take this time to express my gratitude to you and True Father. GPA just finished our last competition for the year, and our internal goal was to "understand True Parents' heart for us." The whole time I was trying to connect my experiences and motivations to you.

Just thinking about the path True Parents took, it's unfathomable. And to know that you two went through it voluntarily is even more amazing. Fundraising for my team was difficult enough, but it was possible because I knew exactly when the last day was. However, there is no end for you, True Mother. It's a complete life commitment.

That makes me think of all the sacrifices I'm unaware of. All the blood, sweat and tears that were shed for me to have the life that I have. For me to have the Divine Principle at my side. For me to have this experience on GPA. I've never recognized just how blessed I am to be a second generation in this movement, having so much support and having so many people love and care for me.

I would like to say, "Thank you, True Mother" from the bottom of my heart. I am excited to have the chance to see you in person for the first time in May. I pray that the American movement and I will have the heart to accept your message as you visit this country of America."—Michielu, Iowa

"I am currently a 2nd year captain and participant here on GPA. I cannot begin to even describe how much GPA has impacted my life. And now as I am doing a second year, I'm helping others to do the same. It's truly a blessing to have gone through all these hardships, trials, tears, laughs, and joys that I have experienced.

Many times I notice, "Wow, I've never done anything so hard in my life," but I also feel, "Wow, I've never felt so much happiness and joy in my life." That is my main point. Without this road of sacrifice, there is no feeling of fulfillment or ultimate happiness. That is why I know, True Mother and True Father, that you feel bad for pushing us so hard, but that you do it because of your love and care that you have for us.

I love you so much, True Mother! Thank you for always being that rock and for loving us like God does. I really want to promise you something. I promise you that I will comfort you, True Father, and God. I know many times I may sway and be tempted, but this is my commitment to you.

Every single moment of pain and suffering was all to break concepts and this shell of confusion. There are so many sides of God's heart that I felt. His heart of pain, suffering, love, anguish, forgiveness, and joy.

Thank you for all that you do, True Mother. I love you so much and will do my best to make you proud and, of course, God proud from that as well. We love you!"—Mako, California

"I can't believe the amount of challenges, realizations and experiences that I am going through in the course of one year! My spiritual growth has made amazing progress since I came here. The environment of being with other blessed children is something that I won't find anywhere else. This is undeniably the best decision I have made in my whole life! Fundraising really puts you in a situation where you have to turn to God, because you have only God to turn to. Being able to point out what I need to work on and what I need to do to have more ownership over my life of faith. There are many ups and downs, but it's because of those downs that we have those internal and external breakthroughs.

Not too long ago I realized the importance of fundraising to the fullest extent! I used to think of it as an opportunity to develop a quality of character that you may be lacking in, now I know that we fundraise because there are certain things that you can practice only when you are out on the frontline. You're not going to be able to learn so much about loving other people unconditionally when you're cooped up in your room! Fundraising might not be the most fun thing to do, but it's definitely something that can help us in our relationship with God, True Parents, and even our own parents.

I am extremely grateful for GPA! So much that I feel indebtedness toward GPA. If anything, GPA should be recommended for everyone. So I thank you for giving me this life to live. Now it's up to me to give back by sharing that same love that I have received with the many others who are out there." — Kyosei, California

"Thank you and thank you to True Father and True Family for all the sacrifice, investment, and hard work put into building God's Kingdom on Earth. I am eternally grateful for True Parents for giving me

life. Without True Parents, my parents would never have gotten married and I would not have been born. True Parents are an inspiration for everyone. Especially for me when I go out fundraising. GPA really helped me grow my relationships with God and True Parents. I struggled a lot sometimes, but I go to God and True Parents for help. Reading God's words or asking myself, "What would God and True Parents do?" really helps me get back up or keep persevering. I am really grateful that I decided to do GPA. I had lots of amazing experiences out on the frontline. I think everyone (2nd Gens) should do GPA. Just like how you have a strong love for 2nd Gens and are investing a lot for us 2nd Gens to grow, I want to invest and keep working hard to help God and True Parents.

Through GPA I was able to understand the importance of having a relationship with God and True Parents. I'm really grateful to God, True Parents, my parents, and everybody I was able to meet for allowing me to have an amazing experience and changing my life." —Hideaki, Illinois