

GPA sends 15 participants to Unificationists in Clifton, New Jersey

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For the “communities” portion of its one-year leadership training, Generation Peace Academy (GPA) recently sent 15 participants to spend three weeks with the Clifton, New Jersey, Unificationist community. With only two months remaining until the end of their training, the young men and women needed to transition from the jam-packed GPA schedule and lifestyle to the life that awaits them back at home and in their local communities after graduation. And what better way to simulate life in a community than to actually experience life in one?



The New Jersey community of Unificationists is the largest in the country, led by Pastor Manoj and Rany Jacob. Its large youth group is very well organized by Youth Pastor Raymond Burns. New Jersey calls its youth ministry “GO,” which stands for “God’s Own.” The whole group was very welcoming to the GPA participants, inviting them to mingle in sports and other evening activities. The young men and women

learned a lot from and bonded with the group through these interactions. First-year GPA participant Norikuni commented: “Interacting with the New Jersey youth in sports was definitely one of the most memorable times in GPA community outreach. Even if I was not up to their level of experience, they welcomed me with open hearts, and that was probably the best part of my time in New Jersey.”



During their stay in New Jersey, GPA participants shadowed Sunday school teachers, helped organize a service project with GO, planned an STF/GPA alumni dinner and performed in Clifton’s church service band. They also visited the New Hope Academy (a Principle-based private school), met and worked with the local church staff, participated in karate classes in the church, and attended Young Unificationist Ministry (Y.U.M.) night. In addition, the group visited a Hillsong Church service in New York City, had “family nights” at the Clifton parsonage, practiced public speaking and Divine Principle lecturing, and learned about Ocean Church from Mr. Terry McMahon and Mr. Kensaku Takahashi. Participants also listened to testimonies and talks from many leaders and members of the community, such as Joe Leonard from Y.U.M., the Spragues, the Burns, Jin Kwon Kim, Raymond Burns, Gerry Servito and Pastor Manoj Jacob, and received a talk on the Marriage Blessing from John Williams.



GPA created and led a workshop called “A Day in the Life of GPA” to introduce GPA and to allow the New Jersey members and GPA participants to get to know each other. The workshop ran from Friday evening through Saturday morning, and included ice breaker activities, testimonies from GPA participants, short talks, and panel discussions. One of the most exciting activities for some was optional—experiencing thirty minutes of GPA-style fundraising. Many who volunteered to experience fundraising were very worried in the beginning, but shared afterward that they had fun and saw how it can be a very deep activity.



In addition to engaging in the Clifton community, the GPA group did outreach activities at least once a week in collaboration with New Jersey’s witnessing campaign team, headed by Rev. Hitoshi Onishi and Mr. Atsushi Takino. The first two days were spent at the New Jersey Institute of Technology (NJIT), working together with the local chapter of Collegiate Association for the Research of Principle (CARP) and using a room on campus for Divine Principle study and discussion.



The first day many GPA participants felt uncomfortable inviting guests and initiating conversations about the deeper meaning of life. However, they had a more eager mindset and spirit and had greater

experiences during their second time out. For example, one pair of participants brought in an interested guest within their first five minutes of arriving on campus, before the lecturers had even set up their room. GPA invited more than 10 guests that day. Sirius, a first-year participant, described his experience, stating, “That day I found the purpose of witnessing: to show God’s love and to give others limitless access to it.”



The GPA team was also invited to attend the monthly National Headquarters meeting at the New Yorker Hotel in New York City. First-year participant Emmanuel offered a testimony to the group about his witnessing experience. The headquarters meeting had a very bright atmosphere, and the GPA team concluded the meeting by performing the dance “Bounce,” with everyone in the audience joining in.



Even with a very busy schedule, GPA did not miss the tradition of flower fundraising over the Mother’s Day weekend. The group was divided into two; one stayed in New Jersey and the other traveled all the way to New Bedford, Massachusetts. Flower fundraising not only helped support GPA and other efforts but also, more importantly, enabled the young people to experience what it is like preparing flower stands and bringing happiness to other people. Kengo, another first-year participant, said, “Mother’s Day

fundraising was a new and amazing experience, because we were able to make people smile and let them pick out flowers for their loved ones.”

Throughout their experience in New Jersey, the GPA young people learned many skills in different aspects of involvement in a local community. Whether learning how to empower others or how to work together in a team, it was a precious experience for all.

Many Clifton Unificationists expressed their happiness that GPA visited their community. Daigo, a nineteen-year-old GO staff member, said: “GPA will always remain in my heart and have a warm welcome here in New Jersey. I never knew you could love a group of people you just met so much! They touched my heart so deeply and inspired me and everyone else in the New Jersey community so much that I can’t help but feel honored to call them my family and my friends. They are so full of talent and heart and greatness that it is unbelievably incredible. I will deeply miss them, and cherish the time that they were here.”

GPA concluded its three weeks in New Jersey with a community farewell dinner, which also celebrated the conclusion of the community’s three-week outreach campaign. The evening was filled with testimonies, karaoke and performances, and offerings of gratitude. It was a beautiful way to reflect on all that the participants had done, and all that they had learned from the community.

