

GPA Youth Discover Value through Love and Service in Argentina

Miguel Werner
February 5, 2013
Secretary General, UPF-Argentina
Translation: Ricardo Gómez



Buenos Aires, Argentina - "I came to Argentina with one question: Where does my value come from?" said David Albuquerque when he began his reflection on the different community services that the Generation Peace Academy (GPA) youth developed in the country beginning January 17. "Many times I was told about the value that God has, but I felt there was more to discover," he said in his testimony given during the emotional ceremony in the Embassy for Peace in Buenos Aires on February 5, which gave the closure of the program that 15 American teenagers carried out in Argentina.

Sacred Bond

The meeting began with interreligious invocations as part of the UN World Interfaith Harmony Week, with prayers offered by Pastor Alberto Roldán (Christianity), Faiza Yahia (Islam), Rabbi Arie Sztokman (Judaism), and Pastor Eduardo Corales (Unificationism). Later on, a video showed the different community activities that were developed by teenagers from different states of the US: a painting of an old Salesian monastery in Vicente Casares, a soup kitchen for children and a chapel in Lobos, improvements made to a building of a Christian foundation in General Pacheco, several tasks in an ecological reserve in Ciudad Evita (all of them in the Province of Buenos Aires), and the construction of domes and ecological projects in an indigenous community in Recreo (Santa Fe).



The meeting included not only an appreciation for the volunteers, who gave love in every place, but also all the organizations that were involved, whose representatives received diplomas, vouchers to enjoy a tango show, and the autobiography of UPF Founder Dr. Sun Myung Moon, As a Peace-loving Global Citizen. Partners in the service projects included Rotary clubs (E-Club West, Villa Don Bosco, Isidro Casanova, and Lobos), IARCOS, Espacio Azul, Educational Foundation 'Águila Visión Internacional,' and the Family Federation for World Peace and Unification-Argentina. Three members of the indigenous community of Santa Fe were also present and expressed their gratitude for everything they experienced.

“Our program gives a strong emphasis on helping participants visualize the kind of person they want to be and believe in the understanding of the necessary path to achieve their goals,” said Francis Marsal, one of the coordinators of GPA, a one-year character-building program for youth who have graduated from high school before they enter a university. “Each one of us is now united by a sacred bond, a bond that was sealed with our sweat, our tears, and our commitment to be people who can live for something bigger,” said John Gehring, director of GPA, who arrived in Argentina on December to organize the different sections of the service.



Challenge and value

The event ended with artistic numbers dedicated to the young volunteers and organizations with whom they worked together side by side during their stay. The first one was a poem by Donato Perrone, a member of various literary circles, representative of the Group Poetas Livres from Santa Catarina (Brazil), and coordinator of the Lyrical Corner 'Café Tortoni.' His inspiration was the “thousands of children, with no distinctions of races or color, who dream of peace” and the “global reconciliation” of human beings. After this, Marcela and Sebastián (from Espacio Azul) interpreted a song that has to do with awakening our essence and awareness that we are inhabitants of the same home, as part of their valuable work that seeks people to commit to be “guardians of mother earth.” Germán Barceló, guest artist, in addition to his spiritually deep songs, also gave a reflection and presented a challenge: assimilate the experiences and learnings into the day-to-day life, starting at home.

The final words from Carlos Varga, Director of the Unification Movement in Argentina, expressed gratitude for “the investment of so much love” from the teenagers and different organizations involved in the community services. His brief message introduced the Family Federation's Choir, whose members interacted with their partners of the GPA during their stay, who also said goodbye with a song. It was the corollary of love and outstretched arms of a meeting organized by UPF-Argentina which had as a motto “Share, appreciate, and celebrate.” It had the support and the praise of the work done in Argentina by the Permanent Forum for Education, Science, and Culture for Peace, MERCOSUR-International Chamber of Commerce, and the Merchant Marine University.



The initiative developed by the GPA in Argentina, which hopes to build bridges of cooperation and strengthen ties of friendship between North and South America, also had as goals to liaise with native people as a way of restoring the past, conscious that a sustainable future is unthinkable without healing old wounds. In this service section, specifically in Recreo (Santa Fe), some of the teenagers had valuable experiences. “We found many kids out there. God wanted to show me something through the kids. And it is that they have much love,” said David Albuquerque, one of the five members of GPA who offered his testimony of what they experienced during the almost three weeks in the country. Beyond the service in particular, “love is what changes our life, what enables us reconnect ourselves when everything ends, and what gives us value,” he said in conclusion.

