

GPA Learning to Love — Maryland

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This week, the Maryland GPA group seems to have been learning a lot about...well...love! Whether it's a seminar about relationships, or an opportunity just to spend time together, we are being given lots of time to contemplate how to make our relationships deeper—in our families, for the community, for each other, and for our future lives. Again we have to thank the Maryland community hands down (these guys are amazing!) for the opportunity to meet so many epic people and spend such an awesome time here.

To begin with, the GPA group received our first workshop on the Blessing—which is, in the Unification Church, the uniting of a man and a woman under God...in other words, marriage! I guess I could say it was a “Marriage Workshop,” but we call it the Blessing because we really see the relationship between a husband and a wife as a blessing that God has given us, and the ceremony is to celebrate and honor this gift. To continue, the workshop was very helpful and enlightening, with us growing older and looking more towards our future. The workshop was given by Tasnah, who has been happily blessed and married for three years. The first presentation was called “Being the Right Person.” Although it might be a while until us youngsters begin to consider the great life commitment which is the Blessing, we are actually preparing everyday for the Blessing. Why? Because the best preparation for the Blessing is to develop and become mature; to work on our flaws and fully know who we are, before we commit ourselves to another. Before we can think of finding an ideal spouse, we must become our own ideal. Luckily, GPA has been helping us to develop ourselves since day one—with challenges testing our faith, patience, and ability to love even when it's difficult.

Later this week, GPA received a seminar called “Real Relationships”, given by Mr. Henri Schauffler. Mr. Schauffler gave us guidance on how to make our relationships empowering, authentic, and lasting—from relationships with our parents, to our siblings, to our future spouses. Without giving everything away, I *highly* recommend this seminar. In friendly group discussions and sharings, we took a good look at our real life relationships. Mr. Schauffler gave us great tips on how to improve our relationships—such as through unselfish love, forgiveness, gratitude, etc.

GPA thanks Maryland for this beautiful week. We can't believe our time has almost come to a close, with our final week coming up. See you then!

The Manchester Files: Saturday through Monday, May 3-5, 2014 May 8, 2014

Busy weekends are fun weekends. That's what I have been telling myself this entire weekend, and it's true. Our entire team was constantly running through the past three days. I can't say that we enjoyed every single moment, but every day ended with a smile.

On Saturday we were helping the Campus family, a Faith Fusion Community family, with their garage sale fundraiser. We set up tables in the Campus' yard and loaded them with fuzzy shoes, books, VCR tapes, and mugs. From a distance our set up looked like your typical high quality yard sale, but we wanted the experience of each person that came through to be more than that. “We wanted to make people feel loved and cared about,” my friend and older sister in the program said. We smiled bright and tried our best to exude warmth and love from our pores. Hopefully it smelled good to people, because we were also handing out our free bookmark invitations to the Faith Fusion service. We wanted to reach out to everyone we could, to give each person the chance to come, if they are searching or feel called.



From Left: Nana, Grace, and Ben, a new Faith Fusion community member, pose in front of their hand made yard sale sign

On Sunday, we were back at Faith Fusion for the morning service, singing, chatting, laughing, and listening to Pastor Thalheimer's sermon. I was in the back of the room working on audio equipment so it was difficult to really take the message in, but Jeremy was inspired. "It just connected to me... how you need to be listening to God, how you listen to God, how you be honest with God."

We spent that night with the church youth. We'd spent plenty of time with the kids, but almost no time with people our age. We want them to feel our love too, so we decided to spend the night with them. We played Apples to Apples to Apples and spent time talking and hanging out. "It was fun," Jeremy said, and that summed it up well.



From left: Kristin, Jeremy, Nana, and Grace listen to Will and his fiancée Johanna during youth night



From Left: Matthew and Johanna, a Faith Fusion community member duke it out at Jenga

Monday was our free day, to rest and reset ourselves for the new week. The problem was that we still had so many responsibilities that needed doing. Finally, Kristin drew the line. “At nine thirty, you guys have to stop. Everything. Watch a movie, do something else. Just put the work away and relax.” So at 9:30 p.m. we gathered into the main room of the house we are staying at, bundled up into our sleeping bags and watched *The Croods*. It was a good, relaxed way to end the week, and usher in the new one.

The Manchester Files – Friday, May 2, 2014 May 5, 2014

This morning we spent an hour and a half studying the Divine Principle. The Divine Principle is the a study of the bible and God’s work throughout history, from God’s purpose for creating the universe, and His creation process, through the fall and God’s efforts until the present to bring humanity back to Him. It is the main spiritual textbook that members of the Unification Church study, translated into English from Rev. Moon’s (True Father’s) teachings.

In GPA, we make sure to save time each week to read the Divine Principle in order to reconnect to and learn about God’s heart, and to learn and understand the practical principles that God has been teaching us through history. We try to put these principles into practice in our daily lives, principles like living for the sake of others, being loyal kids to our parents, and denying ourselves to serve the greater purpose.

At eight p.m. our team put away our blogging, social media, and individual responsibilities to have a few hours to spend together as a family. We went on a hike and played board games like Taboo. We had so much fun that it almost made up for how sick I felt because of all the gummy bears I ate during the games. At the end of it, I was revitalized and ready to take on a weekend of fun and challenging activities.



**The Manchester Files – Thursday, May 1, 2014
May 3, 2014**

We went out witnessing for two hours today on Elm St., from five to seven p.m. Three church members joined us, Pastor Heather Thalheimer, Pat Diamond (Aunty Pat), and Yukiko Fairbrother (Aunty Yukiko). Nana Shibata and I had the privilege of going out witnessing with Aunty Yukiko.



At first we were really nervous and anxious. Witnessing is something that every church does. It takes many forms. Some people do it on the streets, approaching strangers with pamphlets, bookmarks, and a smile, inviting them to our church Service every Sunday. Witnessing also takes a more natural setting. Simply by living one's faith and leading a happy, loving life, one witnesses being an example. Our team here in Manchester does a bit of both.

The thing is that approaching people as they are walking down the street and working in their stores is really scary sometimes. The entire time we were witnessing, I kept repeating to myself, "He's a child of God. She's a child of God. They're all children of God," to deal with the fear and prevent myself from chickening out.

It was not that they were scary people. They were all nice enough, just your average Americans, dressed down in jeans and various layers of sweaters. They were all out on the street enjoying the few worry free hours between work and dinner. Still, it was so difficult to work up the nerve to approach them and start a conversation. I do not know them! I would not know where to begin! I worried about being judged for my faith, about being criticized for my character, or just simply being rejected.

When I reminded myself that each person was God's child, though, I could more easily talk to them. I wanted to love people when I thought of them as my brothers and sisters. Sure, it hurt when they rejected me, but that was okay. Toshiaki said something that really resonated with me, "There is so much we can provide for these people, [things] that we have, that they don't have, [like] community and family and love."

For many of us, who have led quite sheltered lives, witnessing today was a deeper experience into what the world is like and what normal people face. We saw, again, what so many in the world lack: trust, a safe environment, secure love in their life. Our lives aren't perfect, sure, but we have so much more than so many. "The deeper purpose for why we witness to these people is to give life to them," Toshiaki reflected, "That's what the principle is."

We met some people out there that could really use some love, and we hope they can find the time to come to our Sunday worship service so that we can see them again.

The Manchester Files – Wednesday, April 30, 2014 May 1, 2014

We rushed out of the house this morning to get to the Buessings Family home on time to begin our Family Education presentation with Mrs. Marjorie Buessing. Members of the Unification Movement participate in what we call the matching and blessing. In the early years of the movement, Reverend Sun Myung Moon, the founder of the movement and whom we call True Father, matched couples together and blessed them in marriage. My parents were one of those couples married in Madison Square Garden in 1982. At Rev. and Mrs. Moon's direction, whom we refer together as the True Parents, the matching responsibility has been inherited by individual families. In the future, I plan on finding my future spouse and eternal partner – you can tell I have high dreams – with the help of my parents.

The Family and Blessing education we are receiving helps us go over the character traits like responsibility, listening ability, and communication skills that we need to grow in before even thinking about a close relationship of that sort.

After the presentation on the matching and blessing, Rev. Buessing gave a testimony on how he joined the movement, and his experience in witnessing and with True Father. One of the points that stuck out the most to me was when he said that teaching the Divine Principle changed his life. The Divine Principle is a compilation of True Father's early revelations about God's purpose in creating and the challenge and suffering that God went through to raise humanity back up from our fallen state to once again being His children. Rev. Buessing told us that his appreciation and understanding of the Divine Principle grew deeper as he saw people change their lives based on the practical principles taught in the Divine Principle.



We then spent the night hanging out with the kids that come to the Faith Fusion church every Sunday. We wrestled, played charades and watched Rio 2 – which gets my recommendation by the way. The kids were really enthusiastic and bright and we loved playing with them. But what stuck out to me was just how much influence we had on them in everything that we did around and with them. We had the power to shape, in some small way, the way they saw the world and themselves. Maybe we cannot influence every kid in the world, but I hope that we left those kids a feeling that they are cared for and loved.



**The Manchester Files – Tuesday, April 29, 2014
May 1, 2014**

Cheryl, a longtime member of the Faith Fusion community and creator and administrator of the Faith Fusion website, gave us a media presentation this morning as a part of our weekly studies. “People who use the internet a lot can become very individualistic, more so than usual,” Cheryl said, “My purpose in using social media is to share God’s love with as many people as possible.” Her talk mainly focused on using social media sites as “arms” to reach out from a main website to people that normally would not find the site.

We then spent the afternoon house-to-house witnessing, knocking on doors and dodging dogs. Before going out we had the chance to talk with Yoko, a Japanese Unificationist mom and evangelist extraordinaire, who gave us some advice about witnessing. She told us that love and genuine care is what really inspires people and that it is vital for witnessing. The point resonated with me. Caring is key, not just to evangelism, but to life in general. Caring and loving are what make life meaningful and are part of the reason we connect to God, the Father that we all share.



After dinner we went to a book club meeting. Pastor Heather Thalheimer and Cheryl set up the club as a meet-up group for people to discuss spirituality and the deeper aspects of life. Two guests joined the meet-up, Paddy and Mary Anne, along with the seven members of our GPA service team. At first we discussed the book, *Heaven is For Real*, but the conversation quickly turned to discussing the spirit world and spiritual experiences in general.



Paddy and Mary Anne were a wealth of knowledge about the spirit world. They introduced so many new ideas, such as in Heaven we all do what we normally do on earth, but in a pure and grander way, and that, in Heaven, we have the choice to come back down to earth to help people. We all learned a lot from Paddy and Marry Anne and their insights and intimate experiences with spirit world. From the meeting, we were all inspired to look into the spirit world more.

**The Manchester Files – Monday, April 28, 2014
April 29, 2014**

Unlike most Americans, the thought of “Monday” inspires a sigh of relief for our GPA team here in Manchester. Ministry work is often at its busiest over the weekend, and Monday our day to take a new breath in and digest the experiences of our last week.

We spent the morning listening to a talk given by Pastor Heather Thalheimer about the process of growing the membership of a church. The talk covered the steps that are taken to educate a person about our Unificationist beliefs and bring them into the community and raise them further along the spiritual path. It was somewhat difficult for me to grasp and digest all that Pastor Thalheimer was teaching us, but several points stuck out, one of which was to accept people totally for where they are at, regardless of any flaws or bad habits they may have. God wants to reach out to everyone, and everyone is worthy of his love, simply by the grace of being his children. We have to remember not to judge or criticize, but to instead raise a person up from where they are at. That was a powerful point for me.

After the ministry education talk, we spend an hour reflecting on our past week and gathered for a team meeting to share about our experiences, the challenges we faced, how we grew, and how we planned to move forward in the future. We each wanted to make a renewed effort to grow in small, meaningful ways, like helping each other with responsibilities, reaching out and talking to more guests during church, and being more attentive to prayer and our relationship with God.

We then had dinner at the Dumont family home. They made a huge and delicious dinner to welcome us. We felt so much love from them, and from their son John, who watched a movie with us afterward.

Refreshed, our team is looking forward to the upcoming week, which promises to be our busiest yet. We want to give all the love we have received out, through our time witnessing on the street, hanging with the community youth, and attentively listening to and learning from our community elders' guidance.

A Week in Review: Manchester, New Hampshire April 26, 2014

From day one, Manchester has been a roller coaster ride with barely any stops.

Our team of seven arrived in Gloucester, MA last Friday night, on the 18th. The next morning we jumped right into an Il Shim workshop, headed by the local community. Il Shim is a program created by the Unification Movement to educate teens about the importance of purity before marriage. We led discussions about dating, where we were at with our relationship with God, and how to go further in that relationship. And we also created some activities that we played with the workshop teens, like ninja, a karate like game, where the goal is to whack your opponent's wrist to get them out of the game.



The next day we were attending the Faith Fusion Church in Manchester, NH, a relatively new church founded by some members of the Manchester community. The sermon, given by Pastor Heather Thalheimer on the purpose of Jesus' coming and his role as a mentor to bring us to God, was very well rounded, having both music, videos, and a good message. The best part, though, was definitely the warm welcome we received upon arriving at the church. At one point, my GPA friend Kayoung and I were standing at the door as a welcome comity, and yet with each person that came in, I felt more love and warmth from them than I could give out.

On Monday we listened to a Ministry talk by Pastor Heather, talking about the necessary qualities for a church to grow and thrive, and the love that the congregation has to have for its' guests.

On Tuesday, we had a talk on witnessing through media, given by Aunt Cheryl, and how the Faith Fusion church uses its' website, nhfaithfusion.com, and its Facebook page to witness to others on the internet. Then, we spend the afternoon wandering through a trail by a lake, reflecting on what we want to give and learn from this month in New Hampshire. Then we concluded the reflection with a commitment ceremony, declaring the character traits and ways of growing closer to God that we wanted to work on.

On Wednesday we did a scavenger hunt along Elm Street, the down town street of Manchester. We ran all over the area, looking for veterans to thank, people to invite to church, and a large, bronze "Mill Girl" statue. We then spent the afternoon at Rev. and Mrs. Buessing's house, studying about the blessing and how to prepare for it. The blessing is a marriage tradition within the Unification Movement where children are matched by their parents or Rev. and Mrs. Moon with each other and blessed in eternal marriage. It is possibly the most sacred of our traditions, and so education on how to mature your character before it and on how to go into it with the right attitude of wanting to serve and love your spouse, not just to receive love, is really important.

These were valuable experiences, and we look forward to the weeks to come.