

GPA sent 23 participants and staff to the Dominican Republic to serve

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As part of its international service module, Generation Peace Academy (GPA) recently sent 23 participants and staff to the cities of Santo Domingo and Santiago in the Dominican Republic. The young Unificationists were very excited to see the results of their labors in a variety of service projects involving a community center, urban gardening, schools and urban beautification.

Upon their arrival, GPA received a warm welcome from local Unificationist families and youth. The Family Federation Church of the Dominican Republic has its own youth leadership training program called CURSO, which consists of five members and was established this year by a local Unificationist-born young adult, Jacob Gomez. CURSO was working alongside GPA during its three weeks of service activities.



This is the third year that GPA has served in this Caribbean nation, and this year its focus was on completing a community center in Villa Linda, which previous GPA groups have worked on over the past two years. This building will house educational and children's programs, community association meetings, election voting, and other public events. This year GPA and CURSO were cementing the walls and decorating them with stones. While tedious work, the experience helped participants develop the heart of serving.

GPA also did beautification and urban gardening in Santo Domingo, the nation's capital and largest city. In conjunction with street cleaning, GPA participants created mini-gardens for households throughout the area. These gardens not only will provide much-needed food for families but also will bring nature back to the urban community.

Participants learned many things about themselves through this outreach experience, including responsibility and taking care of the environment. First-year GPA participant Yuri said: "I was able to see a small window into the daily life that the people of Dominican Republic face and witness the seriousness of the environmental problem that this island country is shouldering. Through urban

gardening I was able to deeply understand the three great blessings, mostly the third about having dominion over the creation and taking care of what God has given us."

GPA participants also served at a school near Santo Domingo. They painted a mural, moved tires and made cement chairs and tables for an ecological park, and created a children's chess and checkers play area. This experience helped many of them realize their purpose of serving overseas. A second-year GPA participant said: "It was at first hard to see the impact I was making. But through seeing the curiosity of the children and their willingness to help out, I was able to see that through the effort we put in, the children can open their eyes to have the heart to care and help others."

On February 28, having completed their service work in Santo Domingo, GPA and CURSO relocated to Santiago, the nation's second-largest city, and another school, Colegio la Unión ("The Union School"). The Wiesners, a Unification Church foreign missionary family, founded this K-12 school in 2009 and have welcomed GPA volunteers for the past three years. As a low-cost school created to make education accessible to local children, Colegio la Unión is very important for its community's development. Nonetheless, it faces the difficult task of maintaining school premises with limited funds. Over the past three years GPA has helped this school by creating playgrounds and engaging the students. GPA also has plans to bring a number of donations to the school, including toys and school supplies.