

GPA Annual Pilgrimage to New York

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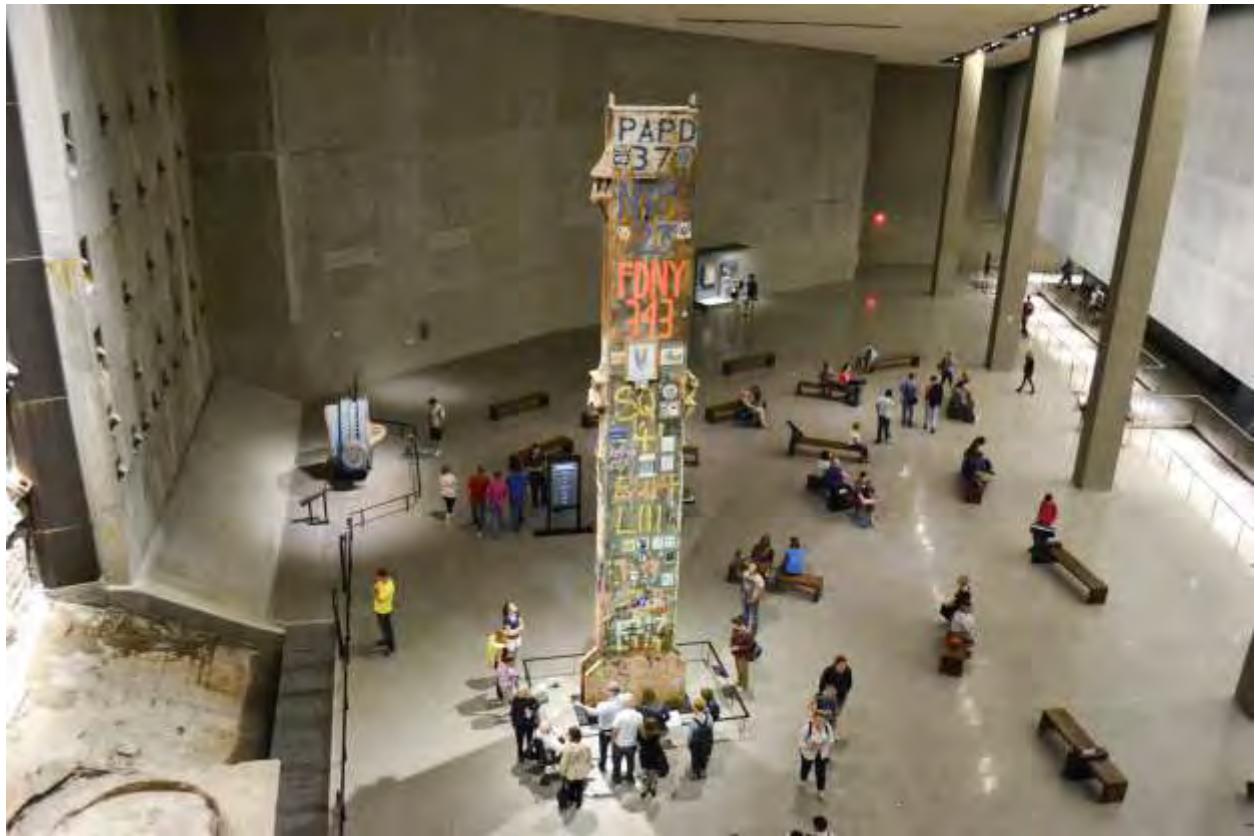
GPA poses for a group picture outside of Belvedere's Training Center with guest speaker Mr. Katsuhiro Motoyama, who was a recent recipient of an award for excellence by True Mother at the last Cheon Il Guk Leaders Meeting in Korea in February, 2015.

Last week the participants of Generation Peace Academy (GPA) spent three days in New York City and Tarrytown, NY, as part of their annual “Pilgrimage” experience. Pilgrimage was initiated last year in order to provide GPA members with the opportunity to learn about significant historical church events that have taken place in the United States, to understand the foundation of the Unification Church in the U.S., and to connect to stories of early members working closely with True Father.



Dr. Michael Balcomb, FFWPU USA President, welcomes GPA to their pilgrimage, which began at 4 W 43rd Street in New York. He shares about the importance of connecting to True Parents through the regular study of scripture.

The Pilgrimage program kicked off in the 43rd Street center, where the young men and women of GPA met with Dr. Michael Balcomb, president of FFWPU USA, and Rev. David Rendel, operations director for the National Ministry Team, over lunch. Rev. Balcomb and Rev. Rendel both recounted personal stories, emphasizing the importance of continuously building one's life of faith after GPA, and being open to whatever plan God may present to you in your life.



GPA visits the 9/11 Memorial. GPA members gather around the last steel beam removed from Ground Zero during the recovery and rebuilding process.

Following a period of education surrounding the Yankee Stadium rally and the historical significance of the Sept. 11, 2001, terror attacks in regard to the Unification Movement, the group made its way to the 9/11 Memorial Museum in downtown Manhattan. Unbeknownst to the group, True Mother had visited the same museum during her recent speaking tour of the United States and had been treated with great respect by the museum staff. After traveling to this site as a group of 95 through the bustling Grand Central Station and the NYC subway, the group walked around the memorial's two large reflecting pools, looked up at the One World Observatory, and prepared their hearts for what they were about to experience inside the museum. Once inside, the GPA participants were able to explore the expansive museum at their own pace. Many of them said they were impressed by the scale of the attacks and moved by the number of testimonials and displays in the museum's exhibits. The whole experience was meaningful for many and helpful for understanding more about this tragic event in US history.

Sholina, a second-year captain, described her experience, saying, "Being at the memorial brought the tragic events of 9/11 into reality for me. But as devastating as it was, I learned about the heroes who sacrificed their lives to save those people in the towers. It gave me hope for people in America." After taking the subway back to 43rd Street, the group had the chance to go souvenir shopping around the streets of New York and close the day off in style.

The next day, the group started off with a Hoon Dok Hae reading about the history and importance of Madison Square Garden. Then the group made its way over to the Manhattan Center to tour the Grand Ballroom, the Opera House, the TV studios, Studio 7, and the "Log Cabin," where Hyo Jin Nim spent much of his time recording his albums. GPA staff member Hiroshi Suzuki offered a slideshow presentation of the True Family's involvement in the Manhattan Center's early days and guided members through the studios. He also told personal anecdotes of being part of Hyo Jin Nim's band and taking breaks from making music to renovate Manhattan Center. The group additionally learned from GPA "mother figure" Louise Honey and her husband, Steve Honey, about 1st generation members' investment and creativity in coordinating the interior design, structure, and marketing of the Manhattan Center. Markus Karr, CEO of the Manhattan Center, spoke about the Manhattan Center's current success and prestige within the modern arts and entertainment industry.

Next Joe Kinney, the New Yorker Hotel's chief engineer and unofficial historian, guided the group through the hotel, a New York City landmark of Art Deco architecture. From the hotel's rooftop down to 60 feet below ground level in its boiler room, Mr. Kinney spoke about the history and restoration of the

building under church ownership. The GPA young people thoroughly enjoyed the dazzling rooftop view of New York City. Moreover, they visited the new HSA-UWC headquarters on the hotel's 12th floor. Following these guided tours, the group split into teams and competed in a scavenger hunt around New York City, which led them to different historical locations and required teams to work together to complete a number of tasks. After dinner, Rev. Andrew Compton, the district leader for New York State, spoke about NYC church history and the Central Park Holy Ground before guiding the group by foot to Central Park to pray at the Holy Ground site. The group sang "Grace of the Holy Garden" and offered a 12-minute prayer of gratitude to God and True Parents for all that they had experienced this year on GPA.



GPA members on the rooftop of the New Yorker Hotel.

On the third day of the Pilgrimage, the group traveled north to Westchester County to visit East Garden and Belvedere. Following an introductory presentation by longtime staff members in the East Garden main room, the group divided into smaller groups to receive guided tours through the Belvedere Training Center, the East Garden Old House (East Garden Museum), the New House, and the Rock Garden. Mikito, a first-year participant, said: "For the first time I could see Father's side as an actual father. Sometimes it may be hard to see Father as a father figure, but the experience at East Garden helped me realize how much he truly loved his children." Ryota, another first-year, stated, "Being in the Belvedere Training Center lecture room, you could feel Father's spirit. Because of all that he invested here, his presence is eternally there."



East Garden staff, who have been working there for 40 years, introduce themselves to GPA and head the various parts of a tour of East Garden.



Members watch a running video of True Father saying good bye to his children before leaving for Danbury Prison. This video plays in the Old House at East Garden, which is now a museum of True Parent's early days in America.

Later that evening, the group had the pleasure of hearing from Katsuhiro Motoyama, a 2nd generation member from Japan who works for the Nippon Foundation and offers consulting services to the United Nations. He gave his testimony, spoke about the possibilities of developing the Unification Movement, and expressed his desire to raise future leaders of leaders. Mr. Motoyama also emphasized the need to strengthen our strengths and to acknowledge and overcome our weaknesses as a movement. His inspiring message was a great way to conclude the Pilgrimage program, as he encouraged inheritance, ownership and individual responsibility. The GPA Class of 2015 had a meaningful experience in New York and is incredibly grateful for everyone who made it all possible!



GPA members pray together with the rest of GPA at the Holy Rock at Belvedere Training Center, NY.