

GPA held its annual Family and Alumni Reunion in Estes Park, Colorado

Roland Platt
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Generation Peace Academy (GPA), the gap-year leadership training program for college-age Unificationists, held its annual Family and Alumni Reunion from April 22 to 24, 2016, in Estes Park, Colorado.

Surrounded by the scenic Rocky Mountains, the GPA participants first had their own reunion, getting together as a group after working in teams in far-flung areas of the United States and the world. For two days the young men and women attended a workshop whose focus was the course of True Parents.

Rev. John Jackson, the district pastor for District 9 (Arkansas, Colorado, New Mexico, Oklahoma, Texas and Utah), was the lecturer. Including his personal experiences with True Parents, he gave very poignant talks about the preparation that had to be laid for True Parents' birth and the persistence and dedication it took for them to lead the Unification movement to where it is today. Short films of True Parents and our movement in the early days were shown—particularly 1976, which was a turning-point year.



On the third day of the workshop, the parents and siblings of the GPA participants arrived, as did the alumni of GPA and its predecessor, the Special Task Force (STF). The exhilaration of families and friends reuniting was infectious, as most of the families had not seen their children in four months. The most exciting reunions to watch, however, were those of several families who surprised their children, not telling them that they were attending!

The first night after the families arrived, after the tears and hugs, a group of ten first- and second-year GPA participants prepared a skit for their parents. It was both a humorous and earnest performance,

depicting how their fundraising experiences had helped them to grow throughout this year, and especially had led to a breakthrough in the parent-child relationship. Tears could be seen among many in the audience.

Saturday morning was launched by welcoming words by Roland Platt, GPA director, and an introduction to all the staff, which was followed by an overview of the entire 2015-2016 year, presented by Yoshika Iwamoto (third-year), Robert Cunningham (second-year) and Erika Gordon (second-year). They focused on the educational purpose and motivation behind all the activities and projects that GPA participants experience during their year in the program.

That Saturday night included a family entertainment program which ranged from songs to dances to poetry recitations, performed by siblings, parents and children, and communities. But the highlight of this moving workshop was the many testimonies given by GPA/STF alumni, GPA participants, and their parents. The alumni gave advice to the current participants about transitioning out of GPA into school or work life, based on their own experiences of being “in the real world” for the last few years. The GPA participants focused on the experiences they have had in the past year which have improved their relationships with their parents, Heavenly Parent, and True Parents. Most of the parents, talking about how they have seen their children transform over the last nine months, expressed gratitude to the GPA program, the staff, and the second- and third-year participants who have been investing into and educating their children.



On Sunday morning, after beautiful songs, Rev. David Rendel (FFWPU national itinerary worker and the father of first-year participant Sarah Rendel) gave a message representing the Headquarters team. He played a video message from FFWPU Continental Director Dr. Ki Hoon Kim and FFWPU-USA President Dr. Michael Balcomb, who were not able to come to the reunion. Rev. Rendel spoke about the direction of the United States in 2016, the four years of hope leading up to the year 2020, and recent exciting events that have taken place in America.

A focus for the GPA alumni during the reunion was having their experiences and feedback listened to by the GPA core staff. Several hours were dedicated to a session in which alumni spoke about their lives after graduating from GPA and mentioned ideas for improving the experience of current members and future applicants. The Generation Peace Academy staff is very excited to begin implementing many of the suggestions that were offered. For all who attended, this Family and Alumni Reunion was an opportunity not only to reunite, but also to reignite hope for the future of our movement.