

UPF Sri Lanka: Religious Youth Service Project in Sri Lanka 2022

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The Sri Lanka 2022 RYS project started from December 11, 2022 ended on December 16 with a resounding success!

The project opened on December 11 with prayers from representatives of Buddhist, Hinduism, Muslim and Unificationist faiths. We saw a record of 58 youths participating from all over Sri Lanka, well represented by both religion and culture. Many were bright university youth leaders attending for the first time. The theme of this project "Intergenerational Solidarity: Creating a World for all Ages" explores and encourages universal values that can transcend all ages, everlasting values that should get passed down through the generations.

The service component of this project directly benefited the 200 families living in the village of Avissawella, situated 45 km from Colombo city. The supporting infrastructure of the water well was built and completed by the dedication ceremony held on 16 Dec. Works include clearing the path to lay the water pipes, installation of electrical works and pump, and mixing and transporting of cement to cover up the well. Good rapport was established with the local community, with many villagers mingling with the participants and serving us delicious homemade snacks and tea.



The education component and cooperative group interaction benefited the participants, helping them to change their attitudes positively toward fomenting intercultural and interreligious harmony and to embrace a wider concept of world peace. For many, this is the first time that they had discussed, lived and ate together with someone from another faith. Despite the many sensitivities in a multi-religious setting, the youths were able to understand the need for respect and understanding. Many share from their religious perspectives and try to find common ground between their faiths. The quality presentation from each group reflects the maturity and thoughts that went into each discussion.

The RYS staff team of 6 worked tirelessly, coordinating the logistics among the many parties involved, from cooks to guest speakers. It is heartening to see so much support from the Sri Lankan professional community in this project... e.g. An army general came to grace both the opening and dedication ceremony, including sending his unit to support us throughout the project's duration... and the CEO of a government board came to give a well-received 2-hour motivational talk.

As the project ended and it was time to say goodbyes, participants' testimonies showed that they had a deep and fulfilling experience over these 7 days. We prayed, as they made their way home, that it will be an experience that they will treasure in their hearts, and that it can spur them to act as a catalyst for interreligious service, love and respect within their own community.