

Generation Peace Academy Teams Depart for Journey of Faith

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Photos courtesy of GPA

It's early February, when an alarm clock pierces through the peaceful quiet of a church ranch in rural Texas at 3:30 in the morning. A short time later, the sights and sounds of a bustling international airport surrounds a group of young Unificationists bound for a special mission abroad. A [GPA](#) group, divided into four teams, is traveling thousands of miles away - to the Dominican Republic, Peru, Paraguay, and the Adirondack Mountains in New York - for a 21-day journey that is sure to change lives.

"Crowding toward the service gate, [our] hearts were bursting with excitement to experience this new journey," says a team member heading to the Dominican Republic. "Twelve hours later, we landed in a beautiful Caribbean country surrounded by clear blue waters and warm, kind-hearted people."

The path of each team will be "filled with passion" and "zeal" that GPA participants say young people possess, as the group looks to contribute to building one family under God by practicing the tenets of unconditional love. Below is a snapshot of each team's experience on their journey of faith so far.

Dominican Republic





In Santo Domingo, the GPA team is met with sunny, idyllic weather that brings them great inspiration. "We all prepared for the day by receiving some words from Rev. Sun Myung Moon, inheriting from the life he led as he set the example of how to see everything as a gift given by God," says a team member. "The morning's inspiration and focus kept us going for the rest of the day [while] learning more about the country and [its] foundation."

Exploring the island nation's busy capital, another team member notes that the streets were "filled with popping colors" and "waves of laughter from children playing around the town." The group visits a Catholic cathedral turned historical museum to better understand the country's spiritual and religious background. "It was a beautiful place to cleanse our hearts," says a team member.

A trip to Independence Park and Los Tres Ojos National Park are among numerous stops that leave the group in awe, as they absorb as much as possible with each captivating moment. Rev. Kono, an elder missionary from Japan who has lived in the Dominican Republic for the last 27 years, shares his personal testimony of perseverance and faith. "Despite the initial challenges and hardships, [Rev. Kono] shared his absolute love toward God and the founders of our movement," says another team member. "This mindset and attitude that he held - that God needs him - must have been what allowed God to work through him and flourish in this beautiful community."

The group also receives powerful guidance from local CARP members before visiting a university in the city, and later, a girls orphanage. "This chance to interact and engage with young [students] from a new country doesn't come so often," says a team member, "[so] we were eager to learn more about each other and were able to surpass our language barrier."

"Seeing the pure and innocent hearts of the [orphaned] children simply dancing, playing around, and trying to converse with us the best they could with limited English and Spanish also impacted our worldview," they say. "We hope this seed of love will continue to blossom within these young girls' hearts."

Peru



After 17 hours of travel, another GPA team's arrival in Peru is a fully immersive adventure from the start as they quickly begin shuttling around the country. With snow-capped peaks in the distance, they eventually make their way to the city of Huaraz, which sits nearly 10,000 feet above sea level. After a brief hotel stay, the team is then off to beautiful Laguna Chinancocha, a lake of pristine turquoise waters surrounded by mountains. "Being there, it felt like I was held in God's hands," says one team member. "I felt so much of God's love there." The group offers a prayer of unity next to a large statue of Jesus overlooking the city - a symbol of hope for the town once destroyed by an avalanche. "It was a powerful moment, genuinely praying for the people of the country we were in and learning to see the [past] tragedy from God's perspective," the team member says.

A visit to the Chavez ruins and Chavin National Museum provides the group with historical and cultural knowledge before they later hit the streets for "fruit fundraising." They gather exotic produce from different vendors at a wholesale food market to sell around town. "With our colorful checkered bags, we began [picking out] fruit," says a team member. "It brought everyone so much joy to get to know our brothers and sisters from overseas a little bit more ... The generosity that people shared was terrific, donating one or two [pieces of] fruit to us, or even entire crates."



Various service projects with CARP members around Peru's capital city of Lima, as well as public outreach excursions with CIG missionaries, enhances the team's experience. A trip to a colorful fountain park, planting some trees on the outskirts of town, and painting a mural at the CARP center - in addition to nightly games and activities - further bonds the group. "GPA has been physically investing in Peru," one team member says. "All the colors [of the mural] were bright and lively, meant to show the richness of Peruvian culture within it; a sign we were here and had an impact. It made everyone feel delighted to be giving back to the

community ... We were able to embody filial piety as we strove to leave behind something through which our Peruvian brothers and sisters could admire and feel our love for them."

CARP seminars and a Divine Principle workshop also creates a "high spiritual environment," says another team member, who recalls feeling "connected to the deepest sorrow of God's heart."

"This immense pain down to my guts could not stop the flow of tears [of] such sadness," they say. "This is the kind of environment and nation ... in which the heavens open up, and you meet God."

Paraguay





"After leaving the airport, we excitedly hopped on the bus and took our first look at the country," says a GPA member whose team arrives in Paraguay's capital, Asunción. "The bright green landscape, palm trees, cats, dogs, and cows greeted us while the rising sun painted the city orange."

Exhausted but excited, the group soon faces a six-hour bus ride to Loma Plata, one of three Mennonite colonies in the country's Chaco region. "Chatter, laughter, and acapella music filled the hotel lobby as we waited for the ride," says a team member. "Our spirits were high, whether we were sightseeing or passing the time for our next journey."

Museum trips, boat rides, and fresh local cuisine brings an overwhelming sense of gratitude among everyone. "It made me more grateful for God's creation," says a team member as they journey toward the Pantanal. "As we glanced to the other side of the river, we were immediately caught up in the beautiful nature of Brazil," they say. "A boat captain who worked closely with Rev. Sun Myung Moon ... shared a short testimony and advice for this trip ... The Pantanal is the place to connect to God, [and] we can admire the beauty of nature and connect to it physically."

In the city of Leda, the group later hears from Mr. Sano, who shares details about True Father's time in South America and his vision for the town. Such testimonies and exploring everyday life in Leda enriches the team's cultural and spiritual experience. "We had the chance to step into our elder members' shoes and inherit their hearts by hand-washing our clothes while dozens of mosquitoes were attacking us," says a team member. "During any activity of the day, our perseverance was tested ... [but] our hearts were filled with gratitude."

Fishing in Leda, as well as San Alberto, helps the group understand the virtues of patience and determination, as demonstrated often by True Parents. "These beautiful creatures are God's creation and won't surrender themselves with force," another team member says. "To catch [fish], we had to have a respectful attitude toward them, being gentle and calm; then we could be successful."

Boarding the True World Marine boat designed by True Father is another poignant moment for the group. "From learning about our history of missionary work, and getting to personally experience nature and the residents, I was able to gain a deeper understanding of God's heart for humanity and the natural creation," says a team member. "As our boat headed out we took a last look at this beautiful land shining in the morning sunrise."

Adirondack Mountains



Though going overseas is an incredible experience for many GPA participants, some choose a different path in deepening their character and life of faith - this time, through "winter adventuring" in the Adirondack Mountains. Guided by two skilled young Unificationists, the group prepares at UTS, their

primary base before a weeklong stay in the remote and icy mountain range of northeastern New York. "[We're] learning about the significance of this world and all of creation, simply to help human beings understand the principles by which God created the universe and to understand His immense love for us as His children," says a team member. "We are here to recognize and receive God's love through His creation."

From pitching tents, to hooking fishing lines and starting a natural wood fire, the team gears up for their journey with great enthusiasm and anticipation. Among various activities on the agenda is early morning ice fishing. "The lake was very icy, and as we tried to walk or glide around the ice, many of us would slip and slide," says one team member. "We stayed on the ice for a few hours, but unfortunately we could not catch any fish ... But the beautiful lake of Adirondack is a memory and scenery that we will never forget."

A course in "orienteering" also provides a new skill for the group, as they learn to use an accurate, detailed map and compass to find specific points in a landscape. "We were excited to learn how to use a compass and properly guide ourselves," another team member says. "We went into nature and challenged ourselves through a small and fun scavenger hunt. We had to work as a team and support one another to find the clues."

Such teamwork while camping in cold terrain leaves the group feeling one with nature and God, as they connect more deeply with each other and reflect on their own lives. "Preparing all the external things we need to go adventuring is important," says a team member, "but we also need to prepare our hearts to have the right intention and attitude to have the best experience out there."

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