

Generation Peace Academy (GPA) Class of 2021 Commencement Ceremony

Akira Watanabe

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After a challenging year with the global pandemic, we're congratulating the Generation Peace Academy ([GPA](#)) Class of 2021! On June 12, some 108 graduates and their families participated in GPA's commencement ceremony.

"My biggest takeaway this year is my understanding and growth in my faith," said Ryan, a first year GPA participant who shared his reflection during the graduation. "My eyes really opened; before GPA, I didn't really have a life of faith."

"This mission really stretched my heart so much," added Hannah, a second year GPA participant on the Heavenly USA team. "I'm so grateful for all of the staff, parents, God and True Parents; and all of the participants and team captains for their love, patience, grace, support, and the many experiences we had together."

GPA, which was founded by the late Rev. Dr. Sun Myung Moon and Dr. Hak Ja Han Moon, affectionately known as True Parents, is a yearlong program that fosters spirituality and faith, cultivates character, and enroots lifelong friendships. High school graduates receive life of faith education and leadership training, serve developing countries, and become global missionaries joining GPA's Heavenly USA and Cheon Il Guk teams.

However, the past year of lockdowns and restrictions around the world posed great hurdles for the group. GPA Director Roland Platt commended all of the graduates and staff, calling it a miracle that everyone

pushed through the year.

"We persevered and got up again," said Platt. "This was the most realistic year with perhaps the best training and preparation for real life. This year we experienced disappointments, setbacks, frustration, and loss. We felt derailed, but we got ourselves up again and we pushed forward and kept going and we ended up really strong."

Hannah, who committed to a third year of GPA, said she was inspired by Jesus and Rev. and Dr. Moon - who overcame various hardships - as well as the love and compassion from her family and peers. "I learned how to put myself aside and focus my energy and prayer on others," she said.

Highlights of the past year were shared in a video montage, and the GPA choir sang a harmonized rendition of "Rise Up" by Andra Day. Family Federation for World Peace and Unification (FFWPU) USA leaders also congratulated the graduates in special video messages.

"Thank you for your total investment this past year," said Dr. Chung Sik Yong, regional president of FFWPU North America. "Through it all, there have been learning opportunities and relationships that were built together with your peers as well as your parents. All of these things are very precious in your life of faith and also in all the future activities that you do."

"This has been a special opportunity to really dive deep into your relationship with God, our Heavenly Parent," said Rev. Naokimi Ushiroda, FFWPU national president. "Please stay involved and connect with your local community, and keep your life of faith and the good habits you have acquired. Have heartistic faith wherever you go."

GPA participants, many of whom enroll for a second and third year of the program, emerge with a range of transformational experiences that they carry with them throughout their lives.

"My intention for doing a second year of Heavenly USA was to help see America fulfill its responsibility as an elder son nation," said Tadahiro. "This intention was always in the back of my mind throughout the year and has guided me in understanding my identity as a unique individual and as a young person connected to True Parents."

For Linako, who was a third year captain of the Heavenly USA team, the spiritual growth she experienced on GPA has been invaluable.

"While in Minnesota, my rental car was broken into during a prayer at a park," she said in a moving graduation message. "They stole my backpack, reflection notebook, workshop notes, books, and my laptop, only leaving behind broken glass."

"When I thought about my notebook that had all of my reflections from the past three years, I felt that my heart was shattered, too," she said. "But my peers started pouring in so much love and supported me in this one simple moment, and I came to realize that the things that I lost were just material things. What matters is the memories, the love, and the relationships that last forever."

After 21 years of leading GPA, Platt encouraged the graduates to bring everything they've learned to the rest of the world.

"You have all shown incredible resilience, incredible resourcefulness, and been able to make the very best and most out of every single situation," said Platt. "Bring your light to the world because America and the world needs it."