

Reflections from Peace Road USA 2020 Team - Reconciling All People

Yoshie Manaka
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Yoshie Manaka (Photo by Stephanie Dias)

From July 28 to August 22, I was very lucky to be a part of the Peace Road USA team, which (carefully, and with a lot of disinfectant and hand sanitizer) traveled to fifty+ spots around America, praying for the reconciliation of all people. The Peace Road 2020 team consisted of six diverse young people, two older drivers, and Reverend Michael and Minister Reiko Jenkins. During the tour, we visited sites of great historic accomplishments, as well as suffering and injustice, throughout America.

The purpose of the national tour was to support and spotlight local initiatives in their efforts toward bringing reconciliation in America and promote Peace Road and Mother Moon's memoir as an answer to the political and social climate in America at this time.

Answering Mother's call

"Two months ago, True Mother asked America to step up," said Joshua Holmes, twenty-four, the van team leader. This Peace Road initiative was in response to that. "But what we found

through this Peace Road trip, was that we don't actually have the integrity to say that we've stepped up yet. We have not taken time to honor the history of America. We discovered that when we pray over these locations and take time to understand that history, honor it, America can really step up. By doing that, we can then say to the Korean Peninsula, 'Let's unite.'

"From this Peace Road experience, I felt that condition being offered both substantially and spiritually by each community, each subregion, each leader. It is a victory that we've laid as America, but I really feel that it is especially True Parent's victory. It was their vision from the very beginning. And for us young people to understand and discover the vastness of that vision was a profound experience. It is the best education we could ever receive. I am very grateful for the opportunity to see America stepping up in this way."

"It's important to inherit the true history of America," said Rev. Demian Dunkley, President of FFWPU USA, "but to also find God's hand in it, and how America is positioned uniquely to serve."



At the US-Canada border (Photograph by Yoshie Manaka)

Owning our history, and America's role

This trip, for me, has really been an experience of understanding the complicated history of America and not shying away from it or turning away from it in disgust -- really, looking at it and taking ownership of it, claiming it as my history too. I am an American. I have responsibility for America. America is my family. The fathers of this country are my ancestors, too.

We stopped in a lot of places: A former slave port in Charleston. Central High in Arkansas, where the Little Rock Nine were the first black kids to attend an all-white high school. A battleground in Oklahoma where Native Americans were massacred.

The motel in Memphis where Dr. King was shot. The Old County Courthouse in St. Louis, where Dred Scott sued for his freedom and lost, but who's Supreme Court ruling was the catalyst for the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Amendments to the US Constitution. The Underground Railroad Museum in Cincinnati. Harrison House in Las Vegas, where black performers including Sammy Davis Jr. stayed when they performed on the Strip but could not sleep in those same casinos (up until the 1960s).

Resfred Arthur, twenty-two, was inspired about learning America's unknown history. "We all know about the history of injustice in America," he said. "But what we don't know about are the righteous people of history. And those were the places that we went to. People like Roger Williams who advocated religious freedom and who amended relationships My point is that throughout this bitter and painful history, God was working through people to restore this nation.

"This is a powerful country. It represents the world in a myriad of ways. In order to heal the world, the problems of the world have to come here, so we can figure out how to gain victory over them, so we can lead the world toward where God wanted it to be. So God has been working with us all the time.

"I'm from Ghana. Two years ago, I went to the Ghanaian Consulate in New York City. The past presidents of Ghana were framed on the walls.

Right next to them was a picture of Obama. You may not know this, but Obama was never a president of Ghana! But he was up there with the Ghanaian presidents! Not because he was a black president but because he was the first black president of the United States. That is what we celebrate.

America's victory is the world's victory. That is what we need to realize. When we realize how much responsibility we hold, and we have so much power, to lead the world. And it all starts with us. This is the reason why True Parents have called us to lead the world today."



An Eog Mansei from the Peace Road participants in St. Louis Missouri (Photograph by Yoshie Manaka)

What loving unconditionally really means

For Stephanie Dias, twenty-one, one of the most meaningful spots we visited was Mother Emanuel AME Church in Charleston, North Carolina. "As many people know, in 2015, there was a terrible incident where a young white man went to this church to attend a Bible study. At the end of that Bible study, he pulled out firearms and murdered nine people. He decided to spare one person, and told them, 'I'm sparing you so you can tell the story. I want a race war,'" she told us.

"I remember hearing that news in 2015, when I was in high school. I remember hearing about it in school and feeling a tremendous amount of pain. So it was quite overwhelming to be at the actual church where it happened.

All I could do was offer a prayer. As I prayed, I said, 'God, please, let me find love somehow for this person who took away nine lives, who took away the chance for them to meet True Parents. How could I love someone like that? How can I ever forgive someone like that?'

"I'm so grateful for Mother Moon's example, because in her memoir, (ch. 6, page 203) she explains the heart behind her and Father Moon preparing to meet Kim Il-sung and the struggle and the pain they went through because of Kim Il-sung. She talks about traveling to Hawaii and praying until they were able to totally forgive him, reconcile and let go of that pain and love him as their younger brother and as their son before meeting him. So, for me, this was an amazing experience where I realized that the only way we can reconcile is with true love."



What messiahs do

We met with changemakers: people who marched with Dr. King, who knew him personally, who kept his legacy alive. Descendants of Black Kettle, Native Americans whose inner strength and faith and regard for their ancestors blew me away. Sweet Alice Harris, the mother of Watts in LA, who did incredible work after the 1965 Watts Rebellion. People in every state we visited who are doing the hard work of reconciliation by being in the same room as each other and continuing to work when things got hard.

I was also personally moved by the hard work and ownership of the members of their local areas. One place that sticks out to me was Sedona Arizona, which wasn't even supposed to be a part of the Peace Road tour. But the community was really persistent in asking us to come, and we're so grateful that they did. First of all, Sedona is beautiful. But also--the community really took the time to educate us about the history of the native people who belonged to that land.

It felt like they were saying, we could do this as a tributary event, but we think it would be more powerful for you to come too. We want your prayers for our people.

They advocated for their local area and the people who belonged to that land. They took responsibility and ownership for those people. That is what a messiah does, tribal or otherwise.

We saw that kind of heart of investment and ownership at every location and every event from our American members. That the local peace road events that we joined were the culmination of many years of investment, relationship-building and reconciliation was so clear. Because of these many years of investment, we are connected to the kind of people who are now attending the Global Summits and speaking up for True Mother.

Reconciliation in action

As we traveled, we stopped and prayed to honor figures of America's history -- Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., Abraham Lincoln, Chief Black Kettle, Harriet Tubman, Sojourner Truth, Sacajawea.

between the English and the Native Americans. People like Sacajawea, who helped explore America, and how Harriet Tubman worked with the Quaker brothers and sisters helping the slaves escape from the

South to the North, into Canada.

We called on these ancestors of mine, these fathers and mothers of America -- to travel together with us, to guide us and help us lead America, to show us the way of peace, nonviolence, to see the true value of each and every human being as a child of God.

"One experience that was so meaningful to me was in Wilmington, Delaware," said Misun Teah, twenty. "We held an event at the Harriet Tubman statue, and there was a leader of the local Black Lives Matter movement who attended. Of course, they looked a little out of place in a Peace Road event with a bunch of Unificationists!

I was caught off guard, and I was curious to see what was going to happen, and how we might bring reconciliation during this time. I was so blown away when Rev. Jenkins shared afterwards that he was able to overcome his concepts and his limitations, and just go to the man and say, 'brother, we're here with you, and we love you.'

"And we saw the shift in this BLM leader's heart. He went up to the microphone with his wife, and he shared with his heart about how love is the only thing that will overcome hatred. Minister Jenkins pulled some holy wine out of her purse, and Dr. Rouse blessed him on the spot. It was so powerful to see that we were able to focus on the most important thing, which was healing and prayer.

That impacted me so much. I realized, we're really bringing Mother's desire and putting it into action. And I felt reconciliation in my own heart and in the hearts of others around me. Mother's spirit and love was definitely with us."

America needs us

"I learned that as great as America is, we came from a long history of pain," says Soonmee Iwasaki. "We suffered as a nation. And this happened when people were divided or pitted against each other because of their color, skin, ideology, culture. But every time that happened, righteous people who believed in God would stand up, not just for their own group of people, but for the sake of all the people.

Because they know that that's what God wants. I learned that even Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. -- we learned that he was a civil rights activist in history class -- but on this trip, I learned how much he loved God. He became a preacher at the age of nineteen years old! That's how America progressed so quickly. America is so young. But because of these people who would stand up at these crucial moments to fulfill God's will, people had to come together.

"We're living at that time now, where people are becoming divided, turning against each other, but it's times like this when righteous people who know God stand up, and seek healing, prayer forgiveness, and who really stand up for America. We need to protect her, guide her. She's still growing.

We righteous people need to repent on behalf of her. We need to be forgiven, to educate and raise her. A lot of us can say that at the beginning of this trip, we felt paralyzed. We felt fear was taking over our hearts and preventing us from taking action and speaking out. But I feel like this trip spoke so clearly to us. That if you know God, even just a little bit, if you have a desire to care for another person, to follow that voice. If you feel like division is wrong, follow that voice, and protect America. She needs us."

God was with us

As we traveled, Rev. Michael Jenkins, who traveled with us to every stop with Minister Reiko Jenkins, dipped True Mother's memoir in every body of water that we passed. "Rev. Dunkley and I were able to dip True Mother's memoirs in the Atlantic Ocean at Plymouth Rock, and at Point Comfort," he said. "And I didn't know if we could make it to the Bering Sea, but we just kept pushing. We dipped them in water around the country, and finally it opened up, and we found a bush pilot who could take us to a fishing village with fifty people living there. And we went to the Bering Sea, and we could see Russia (in our hearts)! When that bridge is built, we'll be able to go right to Russia."

The Northeast Region initiated this tour, which was the vision of Rev. Mika Deshotel and her team. The cooperation of Women's Federation for World Peace USA, American Clergy Leadership Conference, Universal Peace Federation and the Collegiate Association for the Research of Principles made it possible.

We are grateful to all the bikers who came out and to all the communities that planned events and took care of us. I am so full of gratitude for this experience, for the team, and for God's and True Father's protection as we traveled. Minister Jenkins pointed out that we did not have rain at a single event! Thank you to True Mother, who was insistent about our safety as we made this condition and for the prayers and support from our American leadership, especially Dr. Ki Hoon Kim and Rev. Demian Dunkley.