

Generation Peace Academy Reports Good Will Tour in Japan's Quake Zone

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Members of the Generation Peace Academy sorted through the mud and rubble at Ishinomaki, one of the cities most damaged by the 2011 natural disasters.

Trainees of the Generation Peace Academy (GPA) left a new and lasting impression on their fellow Unificationists in Japan during eight days from February 6-13, 2012 spent visiting local churches and doing relief work in Ishinomaki, a city heavily damaged by the Tohoku earthquake and tsunami on March 11, 2011.

On February 6, 2012, 44 members of GPA arrived in Osaka, Japan from Seoul, South Korea, where they had claimed the grand prize as the winners of the Second Annual Unification Church Choir Competition. The morning after their arrival they traveled directly to the devastated site of Ishinomaki, 46 percent of which had been inundated by the deadly tsunami, where they were scheduled to do service work for four days.

“The first day we were only able to work for about two hours because we had to buy boots and raincoats for all the GPA members,” said Luke Higuchi, event-coordinator for GPA and the president of Survivors Against Forced Exit (SAFE). “The site is so muddy, and it’s dangerous to walk without boots. The volunteer work consisted of digging, cleaning debris and separating the scattered glass, plastic, masonry blocks, ceramic, and wood for recycling.”

One staff member of the Ishinomaki volunteer center, through which GPA was doing service work in Ishinomaki said, “The GPA did so much work all at once. It was so helpful to have many people come for several days, because recently the number of volunteers has decreased by 50 every weekday.”

The GPA trainees stayed at a youth hostel about two hours from the site, and coincidentally, about 80 Unification-Church youth leaders from all over Japan were at that same youth hostel for a church workshop. These 80 Japanese youth leaders joined GPA in their volunteer work on February 8, 2012 after which they had fellowship and shared testimonies.

One Japanese member said, “I realized we could overcome the language barrier by having the same faith. The GPA members were so friendly. We hadn’t expected that we could build such a family-like relationship with them.”



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Cultural Exchanges at the Sendai and Kousei Churches

Two days later, on February 10 and 11, GPA participated in a cultural exchange event at the Sendai

Church. Higuchi introduced Roland Platt, director of GPA, who then explained Rev. In Jin Moon's vision for GPA to an audience of more than 100 Japanese members. GPA member Harumi Miyakawa gave a testimony in fluent Japanese about how her father's hometown is part of the Iwate Prefecture, which also was damaged by the 2011 earthquake and tsunami. She said her family is now safe and well but that she very much appreciated the opportunity to serve Japan at this time. The GPA choir then offered several songs and showcased their ballroom-dance routines. Japanese members sang and danced as well.

"Before they ballroom danced, I explained the vision of the Ballroom Dancing Ministry, because the culture in Japan is totally different," said Higuchi. "Japanese men and women are so separated – they can't touch, they can't even sit together. It's so strict. I would know. So, I carefully asked the audience whether we could show them some ballroom dancing. When we danced the waltz and the chacha for them, the Japanese members saw and felt the brother-sister-type relationship of the GPA members through ballroom dancing, and it was beyond their imagination. They'd never seen that kind of family-like relationship between young people before, where young men and women were taking each other's hands and dancing.

"They were so impressed, and their attitude towards us changed dramatically. The leaders of the Sendai Church hadn't been very prepared to welcome us because they hadn't known what to expect, but they and the leaders – from the Kousei Church in Tokyo, who were present at the cultural exchange at the Sendai Church – were so moved that they gave us heartfelt welcomes later on in the week when we visited their churches. We all had a wonderful time. Many people said how they felt both a vertical and horizontal attitude from GPA members, which they hadn't expected, because GPA was 'American.' Therefore, their image of America and of the American second-generation totally changed.

"There were many members who had felt crushed by the natural disasters in Japan, but it seemed that their wounds were healed by the singing and dancing of the GPA members."

On February 12, 2012 the GPA choir sang for a gathering of 400 at the Sunday service in the Tokyo Kousei Church. After the service, GPA had fellowship with their Japanese brothers and sisters in Tokyo in a similar way they had in the Sendai Church.

"The Japanese members were so excited, so impressed. They really loved GPA. We even danced a line dance to Shakira's 'Waka Waka' together," said Higuchi.



Members of the Generation Peace Academy overcome language barriers and engage in animated discussion with their Japanese brothers and sisters.

Afterwards, GPA traveled to the Shibuya Station, one of the busiest stations in Tokyo, where Higuchi had planned to demonstrate against the kidnapping and faith-breaking that has been and is still taking place in Japan.

"We went into the station and began to sing [Billy Joel's song] 'For the Longest time' and [John Denver's] 'Country Road.' Quickly, a big crowd formed around us – bigger than we had expected," recounted Higuchi. "There were probably more than 100 people surrounding us. Then policemen came and stopped us, saying that we were blocking the paths of passersby. But the people really liked the GPA choir's singing and somebody even yelled at the police, 'Why did you stop them?' and told us to keep going. But we had to leave. So, we moved to the Yoyogi Public Park, where again, we drew a big crowd through singing and then took a picture with our audience.

"Later that day, we had dinner with about 40 Japanese youth members from five different churches in Tokyo at the Shibuya Chinese restaurant. The next day we traveled to Asakusa, the site of a Buddhist temple, a world famous sightseeing spot."

Higuchi's Testimony

For Higuchi as well, who had been born and raised in Japan, the experience working with the GPA

members was a “deeper and stronger experience than expected.”



The 44 members of Generation Peace Academy are all smiles after a day of muddy relief work at Ishinomaki. One Japanese member commented: "It was impressive to me that they enjoyed [the] volunteer work. I think it's a beautiful culture that they are always trying hard with such joy."

He said, “The GPA members really had an immense heart and sense of respect and gratitude for the Japanese brothers and sisters. During their relief work they worked really hard. We had a prayer service in Ishinomaki on February 10, the last day of our work before going to Sendai. That prayer service was an unbelievable experience. All the GPA members walked around the devastated site and began praying on their own. They were really crying and feeling so deeply. Our Japanese brothers and sisters were so surprised. GPA is so outgoing and fun-loving, and they really enjoy serving. They are not like the Japanese people, who work with such a serious attitude. The GPA members are so joyful, but once they start to pray, they become deep and serious. We all really felt how deep the second-generation from America were.

“I hope we will do this again. And it’s not only me – Japanese leadership is asking for GPA to visit again, even as soon as next month, because through GPA, they saw hope for changing their youth in Japan. Their experience was so wonderful, their testimonies so wonderful. The attitude of the Japanese leaders really changed. There was no language barrier, they just talked with each other, whether in English or Japanese, I didn’t know. They were communicating somehow and it was great.”

Testimonies from Japanese Members

“My impression of Americans has changed 180 degrees after spending four dream-like days with GPA. I had the impression that American members always act in funny ways and prioritize themselves over others. But my experience was totally different. After spending time with GPA, I was very inspired by the way they thought about others more than themselves and always lived for sake of others. I realized that even though I’d always been saying, ‘one family under God,’ I hadn’t realized what it meant in my heart.” – **STF member, 19 years old**

“I got a lot of motivation from the GPA members during this period. They had the gratitude and passion to do work for Japan, on behalf of In Jin Nim. Their actions showed this. It was impressive to me that they enjoyed everything from volunteer work to chorus practice in the bus and *hoondokhwe*. I think it’s a beautiful culture that they are always trying hard with such joy. I take my hat off to their energy to act and taking initiative in making a change. They showed marvelous power when they lived for the sake of others. They worked without hesitation and twice as much as the Japanese members did. I want to follow their example.” – **Japanese CARP member**

“I felt the depth of the American members’ hearts through the GPA members. At the same time, I felt my heart was healed. I understood why I felt such a way through Mr. Higuchi’s words. He said ‘We have been unable to help Japan although we had the same feeling as that of an elder son wanting to help his mother. American members really respect Japan and want to help Japan. It is a historical first step for the second-generation of the elder son country, America, to help the mother country, Japan.’ I felt the culture of heart that the American members owned and the love of In Jin Nim through his tearful words. I felt the efforts of the elder son country could really heal and help the mother country.” – **Japanese CARP member, 27 years old**