

Youth Ministry activities in Boston, Indianapolis, Virginia and Los Angeles

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In Boston, Youth Minister Tazuko Sugajima tried to spice up Hoon Dok Hae discussions for high school and middle school students by creating questions that related back to the reading but were simple enough for everyone to answer. “It’s a challenge to make things relatable for a wide age range,” Tazuko said. “I was glad to have a session where everyone was participating.” For fun, the youth community engaged in a pumpkin carving activity involving stencils and pro pumpkin carving tools.



Norikuni Nishikawa, in Indianapolis, used some of the activities provided through the Youth Ministry website. Leaders first asked all the youth during one of their Saturday meetings, “What are the top ten

most important things that our faith community believes in?” The group narrowed down the list to the things they could relate with most and, in doing so, saw where everyone was at in their own personal beliefs and spiritual life. Norikuni commented, “Not only was it the first time for me to take on something that’s more serious, but we had a lot more coming in than expected.”

A series of questions related to personal growth and development helped the young people zero in on what makes them feel empowered. By the end of the night, the teens were discussing their ideas, hopes and plans for the future. “Indiana is still new at getting deep or serious into such topics,” said Norikuni, “but not only do I believe it is necessary and beneficial for us, it opens the opportunity to see how we are doing with our lives outside of our public life (school, church, social gatherings/media, etc.).”

Tamami I., one of the youth participants as well as the newest member in Indiana’s youth ministry team, told about her experience with the most recent program: “I think everyone actually tried to think a little deeper this week about this topic, and many of them were willing to share their thoughts. It was a good opportunity to learn everybody’s thoughts and visions. I enjoyed being able to share my thoughts as well!”

In Fairfax, Virginia, Youth Pastor Owin Pierson interpreted the theme of empowerment as giving someone the power or authority to do something. “I loved this word because it really incorporates what our Northern Virginia community strives to do every year in November right before the holidays,” he said. Every year for the past 16 years the group has done a Leaf Raking Fundraiser. The group puts in a lot of hours and hard work. It is not an easy task to do some of the really big properties. On average the group fills sixty 40-gallon bags for each house. The volunteers range from elementary school all the way to parents. However, most of the core team consists of high school and middle school students. This year, the group raised \$1,650.50 that would support the Schools of Africa Project of the Women’s Federation for World Peace (WFWP).

The project serves as a good way for young people to get in volunteer hours for school but is also a great way to come together and do something as a community. Some of the perks are free food from a variety of sponsors. Local businesses, such as Domino’s Pizza, Papa John’s, McDonalds, Subway, Wegmans, Sam’s Club, Dunkin Donuts and local Chinese restaurants, all helped support the volunteers. It really showed the teens that their service was appreciated.

“I felt that our youth ministry not only supported the Schools of Africa Project and raised funds for our own future ministry endeavors,” said Pastor Owin, “but left a lasting imprint in all the businesses, families, friends, and church community involved.”



In Los Angeles, the group used its own theme of “having a healthy spiritual diet.” Youth Pastor Takafumi Sasaki explained what it meant to practice spirituality by comparing it to having healthy habits such as

eating well and exercising. The examples and activities were designed for the teens to become aware of their current habits and discover how they could enrich their lives by setting aside even a little time for spirituality in their daily routines.

In one session, the leaders used meditation as a way for the teens to tune into their inner selves in a relaxed and peaceful state. It was an important lesson in taking time to connect deeply with oneself. The main takeaway for the group was that practicing spirituality was just as important in one's life as eating healthy, exercising and keeping active. "As difficult as it is to maintain a healthy diet and exercise for your physical body, cultivating your spiritual body is just as difficult, if not even more challenging. It really puts into perspective the value of spirituality in one's life, understanding and growing from the struggles you face in your life," Takafumi said.