

FFWPU USA Youth and Young Adult Ministry's Peace Starts With Me ChicaGO!

Kaeleigh Moffitt
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From October 18 to 20, the Youth and Young Adult Ministry (YAYAM) hosted a Peace Starts With Me ChicaGO! Youth and Young Adult Weekend in concurrence with the True Family Values (TFV) Awards Banquet hosted by Family Federation for World Peace and Unification (FFWPU) USA.

The youth weekend imbued YAYAM participants with confidence, Unificationist pride and excitement, empowering them to share the Peace Starts With Me message with the wider community. The program welcomed 250 participants, including Generation Peace Academy (GPA) students. The Midwest was overwhelmed by the support they received, which was the key element in creating a familial atmosphere for the weekend.



The weekend kicked off with a Friday evening program under the theme "Who We Are and Where We're

Going." A sense of appreciation and hope in the future of the Unification movement was built through Testimonies from A. Becker, D. Drost, and S. Ogden. On Saturday morning, Rev. Demian Dunkley, president of FFWPU USA, shared a powerful message to YAYAM participants about the value of getting involved and working through God's providence rather than being "swept away in the rapids of history."



Then, during the TFV Banquet, the Soul Children of Chicago moved many with their passionate and sincere musical performances for God. Many YAYAM participants mentioned how touched they were by the Unification movement's heartfelt investment in interfaith relationships. Senior Vice President of Women's Federation for World Peace International (WFWPI) Dr. Sun Jin Moon's featured message rang deeply with the youth. "I directly felt how amazing our True Mother is through Sun Jin Nim's speech, because the heart and wisdom that she delivered through her words was of warmth and embrace, like a mother," one participant stated. True Mother is an affectionate term used by Unificationists to refer to Dr. Hak Ja Han Moon, co-founder of FFWPU.

During Saturday evening's JAM, a highlight of the weekend, YAYAM participants displayed incredible energy through the "Mujogeon (Unconditionally)" performance. The Soul Children once again passionately sang along with several other inspirational performers and speakers, including Rev. Dunkley who shared about the significance of forgiveness within creating peace.

A morning service on Sunday culminated the Peace Starts With Me weekend efforts with resounding success, displaying the beautiful unity among the congregation. Dr. Sun Jin Moon focused her sermon on addressing questions and concerns from the youth with clarity and sincerity.

The ChicaGO! Youth and Young Adult Weekend concluded with Next Step Forum breakout sessions, which included Kaeleigh Moffit sharing about the various synergistic young adult programs, Chu-in Bonkougou talking about the Northeast Winter Workshop collaboration with the Midwest Region, and Naokimi Ushiroda discussing Youth and Students for Peace (YSP) interfaith activities. Several exciting ideas were shared, building momentum for the upcoming December 28 rally.

Reflections

"Today, I had an incredible opportunity to experience the Peace Starts With Me weekend in Chicago, my hometown. Hundreds of people filled the banquet hall; all from different religious, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds. Yet, the atmosphere was like a family. I directly felt how amazing our True Mother is through Sun Jin Nim's speech, because the heart that she delivered through her words was of warmth and embrace, like a mother. Peace is something every one of God's children can resonate with because deep down it is what we all want. My biggest highlight of the day was the JAM. I definitely felt our collaboration; dancing, and singing with all kinds of people and groups was a testament. Our interactions are a testament to our True Parents, because, as the fruit of their love, we brought a culture that was embracing and filled with love for all of our brothers and sisters." –Anonymous

"I personally had such an incredible experience. I was able to understand the important role second-

generation Unificationists have. I could really see how we create the culture, and the culture we create is so beautiful. I was so excited to meet my Christian brothers and sisters, and was truly honored and humbled to be in their presence. I could feel their sincere and good hearts. During this short amount of time, I really experienced what unity is, how God, our Heavenly Parent, really wants a LOVING FAMILY! Recognizing that everyone is your brother or sister is something truly special. I hope everyone can have that feeling one day and that we can make one joyful family for God." –Anonymous



"My highlight of this Peace Starts With Me Gala was being able to interact with other Christian youth and the Soul Children of Chicago. I'm glad we got the opportunity to sit with them during the gala. At some point, one of the Soul Children and I were singing and dancing together, and I could feel so much genuine love being shared between us. Before, I only really got to interact with older Christians when we would visit churches on GPA. I look forward to more moments like this." –S. Schlaepfer

"I'm always astonished by the depth of heart of our community. This international community is such an embracing, sincere family. No matter where we come from, what we've been through, what we've done or what we do, we always have a family that loves us unconditionally. This is how I imagine the Kingdom of Heaven to be like. Through this event, I not only understand that peace in any shape or form starts with me, but also that change starts with me. It makes me extremely happy to see that hundreds of people are supporting this decision to bring about change by changing themselves first." –Chloe W.

"It was very inspiring to see both Unificationists and other Christians really uniting together as fellow brothers and sisters. Even the smallest things we do can act as a condition to help the providence, especially if we're all gathered together. I was really able to feel that the key to success is really to unite with God and True Parents and being able to fully trust God no matter what. I hope we can keep up the great unity and energy from this event and continue building it not just for the December event, but for supporting the Heavenly USA as a whole. I hope I can spread more love to others." –T. Shibata

