

RYS-2016 in Washington, DC

Reported by Yemi Grace Mock and Sasha Okon

Introduction

The Generation Peace Academy (GPA) participated in this summer's Religious Youth Service (RYS) program in Washington, DC. Directed by Tomiko Duggan, the RYS is a project of UPF and focuses on developing young people's personal leadership and peacemaking skills. Seventeen GPA members plus three staff, Louise Honey, Jan Pearson and Francis Marsal participated in the weeklong experience from May 20 to 28.

May 21 - Saturday

Today was the first full day of the RYS, and starting the week with a relaxing first day made it more fun and enjoyable; it was a great way to introduce the program. Our day started with welcomes and an orientation to the RYS program. The two speakers: Tomiko Duggan and Susan Fefferman are both such exemplary role models. We could feel the spirit of Father and Mother Moon when they spoke. In our orientation, they explained that the mission of RYS is for young people to develop personal leadership skills based on Father's life-long motto, "living for the sake of others." Their lectures were given to us as if we were already the leaders of the future and it inspired us to think on the global level.

In the afternoon, we visited the Smithsonian's National Air and Space Museum and saw the historic aircraft and spacecraft. We loved that! In the evening we were served a wonderful home cooked meal at the UPF Peace Embassy, which is all GPA-RYS could ever ask for. As second year participant Ryota Naito said, "we felt the warm heart of the mothers that cooked it. [We] couldn't help but want to eat more and more." Walking around the Embassy and looking at the different pictures and memories of True Parents and the early days of our Movement brought a deeper sense of closeness to the founders and to our own parents. Furthermore, Mrs. Duggan's precious and beautiful testimony about her fight for her life of faith at such a young age also moved us and left a lasting impression, especially her journey of discovering that God is part of and will always be with her.

May 22 - Sunday

Today was a day of pure reminiscence, exploration, and adventure! In the morning, RYS visited the New Hope Family Church in Maryland to attend Sunday service. Rev. Hiroshi Inose, the national itinerary IW, spoke about the significance of the *Yankee Stadium Rally* in 1976. Many of us did not know why Yankee Stadium was important until today. We learned that it was because the people there at the stadium were able to restore Jesus' crucifixion through not giving up or abandoning True Father. It was especially inspiring when he explained how true love required participation with a clear mind, commitment, purpose and determination.

In the afternoon, we toured the city and visited many monuments and memorials -- Lincoln, World War II, Vietnam, Korean War, Martin Luther King Jr., and the Washington Monument. Church elder, Matthew Goldberg, served as the tour guide, and his dedication and love for history fully engaged us. Through Mr. Goldberg's enthusiasm and passion, we were able to feel his heart and why we need to know more about our nation's heritage and history.

For me, the Korean War Memorial was the most amazing one of all because I was told that the soldier sculptures trudging along the brushes were of all different races. I spent my time studying the faces of each statue. It was inspiring knowing that so many nations came together to fight for Korea's freedom from communism. Dr. William Selig, the RYS project director, accompanied us. Dr. Selig worked with Dr. Bo Hi Pak for the 60th anniversary of the war when True Parents commissioned the Little Angels of Korea to visit all the nations that sent military and medical help and to convey the gratitude and love of the Korean people for rescuing their nation.

We returned to the Imani Temple for a delicious home-cooked dinner, then had time to relax and get a good night's rest. When reflecting upon this day, exploring the memorials was clearly the highlight event. We quietly touched the memorials, brushed our young hands on the names etched in the marble walls. As somber as it was to look at these different memorials, we felt Heavenly Parent's heart that he has had to ask his children to sacrifice and continuously fight for the providence. Today was a heartfelt reminder of what America has given to the world. We felt humbled but proud of our nation and inspired as second generation to carry on the hopes and dreams of our True Parents.

May 23 - Monday

Today was yet another day in RYS packed with exciting and eye-opening activities! Our main focus of the activities was education about the different religions. In the morning, we went to an interfaith conference organized by RYS at The Washington Times. Six different faiths were represented: Judaism, Catholicism, Protestantism, Buddhism, Islam, and Unificationism. Starting the meeting off with a candlelight ceremony, which was where RYS participants read quotes and sayings from different faiths and lit candles, brought an atmosphere of acceptance and peace among the participants, speakers and guests.

Rabbi Mark Rafael gave an excellent overview of the main beliefs, holidays and practices of Judaism. He passed around for everyone to touch different items: the yarmulke (skullcap), a menorah, a shofar, and Tefillin (black leather box containing verses from the Torah).

Fr. Khoa Nguyen, a Franciscan Catholic priest, shared about his amazing escape by boat from Vietnam after the Communist victory in 1975. He said, "the experience of escaping by boat allowed me to grow in faith. I had to leave Vietnam without saying goodbye to my family, drifting in the Pacific Ocean without knowing where or when the journey

would end, and having only water and sky as my companions. All of that opened for me in the eye of faith. There must be God.”

Rev. Vandy Kennedy, pastor of the Walker Hill Baptist Church, explained how it was his grandmother who first instilled in him a love of the Bible and God. One of the participants asked what he thought was the most pressing hindrance in humanity? Rev. Kennedy said, “The knowledge and wisdom of God’s understanding. The key is to get understanding so you know where to go and what to do when you get there.”

Dr. Mimi Hassanein who grew up in Egypt and immigrated in the 1970s, shared about her experience as a Muslim and her work to help educate and dismiss misconceptions about Middle Eastern culture and Islam.

Ven. Bhante Uparatana, a Buddhist monk, explained that coincidentally our conference coincided with the celebration period commemorating Buddha’s birthday. Rev. Richard de Sena gave an introduction to Unificationism.

It was a great blessing to hear about the beliefs and practices of all the different faiths and recognize the many points of commonality that we share. The environment was interesting because various religious figures were in the same room, discussing their faith, but at the same time, everyone spoke in a manner respectful to the other religions.

We all were able to see this activity as one that is healthy for our spirits because it pushed us to practice humility and openness towards other faiths. As Father said, no matter what position we are in, we must become like students with open minds and open hearts, because then we are able to humbly and respectfully learn from others. We recognized the value of bringing together representatives of the different faiths. We learned about their faiths but they also had a chance to learn about Unificationism. It was really a win-win situation. The next day, the Catholic priest who spoke to us sent the following email:

Thank you for providing me a chance to talk about God who has changed my life upside down and inside out. It is me who needs to express the gratitude for encountering many good people at the Washington Times. Your organization is God's instrument for the youth. May the Lord continue pour out much blessing on you, your family and Religious Youth Service.

After we heard from the different speakers, we visited different religious sites: Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception, the Washington Hebrew Congregation, and The Islamic Center.

At the religious sites, usually a tour guide or religious figure was with us, answering our questions and giving us new insight. At the Washington Hebrew Congregation, Rabbi Aaron Miller engaged us in Q&A about Judaism. He was very interactive with the audience and even showed us real Torah scrolls, which are handwritten with a feather and special ink on carefully prepared parchment!

At night, we had a presentation at the Imani Temple about the activities of UPF by Mr. Richard De Sena. Through that, we could see the importance of having God-centered and faith based organizations such as UPF. It was also a great reminder that we, as the new generation, hold the future in our hands.

May 24 - Tuesday

The day started at the Department of State and then to the Department of Education where we saw how these government officials link peace and interfaith into their activities.

At the Department of State's Office of Religion and Global Affairs, the speakers shared how religion has played a big part in their lives and careers, and how that influenced their hope for religion in the world. Arsalan Suleman, who is the Special Envoy to the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, spoke about religion and the role it plays in America's foreign policy. Rebecca Blachly, Senior Policy Advisor for Africa stated, "It is always important to remember one's own identity." She explained how she found her identity through her religion, and is committed to help the world understand their value and identity no matter what faith they have.

Ken Bedell and Anna Leach of the Center for Faith-based and Neighborhood Partnerships at the Department of Education shared about their mission which is focused on how to bring the faith component into schools, and to create a safer and more tolerant environment for students to speak about their faith. They extended an invitation to participate in the President's Interfaith and Community Service Campus Challenge, which will be held Sept. 22-23 at Gallaudet University. Responding to a question from a participant about religion in the education system, Dr. Bedell said that only one percent of the public schools teach about religion.

At Capitol Hill, we had a chance to meet Rep. Chris Van Hollen, the democratic representative from Maryland and then took a walking tour of the Capitol. Afterwards we visited the offices of Cong. Danny Davis (D-Illinois) and Cong. Rodney Davis (R-Illinois). Congress was in session and the congressmen were not available so we met with other staff members.

Participants agreed that meeting Joe Peters, the legislative assistant for the democratic congressman of Illinois, Danny Davis, was the highlight of our time on Capitol Hill. His passion and belief that people should accept others for who they are was so strong. He and Congressman Davis firmly believe that a person should not think that his particular religion is better than anybody else's. That kind of thinking will only lead to disunity and conflict. Mr. Peters said, "we can fight for peace by being the examples and the representatives of unity and compassion."

The evening guest speakers, Angelika Selle and Joe Taylor expressing their personal experiences with God was another highlight of the day because they explained how it was

so important to have faith because people will not always say what's wrong or right, but it is our responsibility to make decisions centered on God's heart. We ended the night realizing that we are so blessed because we are given the opportunity to pursue our passions and dreams while working to create a home for God here on earth. Sasha Durst, a participant of RYS voiced that "we are the hope...We have the potential to be great leaders of the world...We have value!!"

Throughout this program, speakers, guests, and even first gen members of our Movement have told us that we are the hope of this world, but now we are starting to realize it for ourselves and that we do have the potential to make a difference, whether in business, media, education, the arts, wherever – we are the hope!

May 25 - Wednesday

As part of the RYS program to expose us to the different ways that God is working in the providence, each day we visited different organizations, think tanks, embassies, etc. One thing we've realized is there is absolutely always something new and insightful to learn wherever we go!

At the Embassy of Indonesia, Mr. Siuaji Raja, Minister Counselor of Media & Socio Cultural Affairs said that while the largest Muslim population in the world is in Indonesia, he emphasized that the country is a multi-cultural country and embraces numerous religions, and consequently a broad range of spiritual values. Responding to questions, he described the general mission of an embassy and the duties of the staff. We toured the beautiful building, which was constructed 100 years ago by Thomas Walsh, who had emigrated penniless from Ireland to America and made his fortune in gold mining.

Afterwards, we went to the International Center for Religion and Diplomacy (ICRD) to meet with Michael Braeuninger who introduced us to faith-based diplomacy and reconciliation in conflicts, and some of ICRD's projects in Colombia, Yemen, and Syria, especially Madrasa Project in Pakistan. Mr. Braeuninger said, "Even in conflict not all people are bad all the time. We are a hopeful organization. Every individual holds the potential to move on even in a state of conflict." One participant said, "ICRD is incredible. They act upon their core beliefs to unite people and mend hearts by taking on difficult tasks and risking their lives [...] It brings me back to the ideal of the Unification Movement. What ICRD is doing is a great blueprint for us to follow in order to actionize our faith."

At the Heritage Foundation, we met with Elinor Renner and Dr. Ryan Anderson, who stressed the importance of the five major aspects that they focus on: individual liberty, family, limited government, traditional American values, and a strong defense. Their mission is to create and promote innovative policies and find ways to get those ideas out to the field. One of the main points made by Dr. Anderson was that we shouldn't just tolerate each other; we should understand and accept each other, thereby creating space

for everyone to freely seek out their relationship with God in their own way and their own faith.

At the Embassy of Lithuania, Ms. Evelina Petrone, First Secretary, explained Lithuania's long history to fight for its freedom and independence. She even gave us a quiz to see how well we listened. The ambassador surprised us with his presence. Amb. Rolandas Krisciunas, who has been posted to the USA for less than a year, spoke to our group about his own professional and diplomatic career and also about the embassy, which is the second oldest in Washington. (The first is Poland.)

In the evening we heard powerful testimonies from Archbishop Stallings, and three guest speakers from the "FFWPU Women's Leadership Forum." Listening to the sacrifices that were made, we could see how they became God's heavenly soldiers. The speakers shared their experiences in the Movement and how they took ownership over their lives of faith. Archbishop Stallings explained that to find our place, our purpose in this world, we need the Principle, and only by understanding the Principle can we leave this world better than when we entered.

Barbara Moseley-Marks, Libby Henkin, and Susan Fefferman were the other speakers. Mrs. Fefferman declared that we can't do anything by our own power, but "as channels for God's power of heart and love then anything is possible." Rena Kanazawa, RYS participant said, "the way God has personally moved every single one of them, and how they fought through their difficulties with their conviction in God was so moving. I've come to realize that my unity in heart with God is so important in my spiritual journey."

Throughout the week, we have been learning how to substantialize our faith while promoting peace and unity. Grace Roberts, another participant stated, "I was hit by the feeling that all of these representatives and delegates that we've met are all trying to tackle the same goal with different methods. Everyone is driven and desperate to make a change, as we are." In our journeys of faith, we sometimes feel alone watching the world, but we've come to realize that the world is slowly moving towards peace and the age of Cheon Il Guk. The world may not fully understand the internal meaning of the age we live in, but God is with us. We are not alone.

May 26 - Thursday

Out of all the many packed and rushed eventful days on this program, today was one of the most internal and inspiring. Sightseeing at the White House and taking an RYS group photo was the first item on our agenda. When we stood outside the White House, we were all surprised by the building's simple exterior. The White House seems massive, yet at the same time, modest and dignified. We snapped a photo in the middle of many other tour groups, than went off on our own to explore the beautiful surrounding area. Then we walked from the White House through Lafayette Square and visited the Consulate of the Bahamas for a briefing about that beautiful Caribbean nation.

Third secretary/vice consul of the consulate, Ms. Faith Maycock talked about the history, culture and tranquil life in the Bahamas. Tourism is the number one industry, and even though the place and the culture is magnificent and beautiful, Ms. Maycock said that their “government is run by mostly older people with old concepts that need to be changed and shifted by the young, bright minds of the newer generation.” It was a good reminder that that we are the future generation that needs to step up in America too. The consulate generously provided us lunch so we retraced our steps and ate our sandwiches back in Lafayette Square.

Next was a visit to Arlington National Cemetery where more than 400,000 men and women are laid to rest. These are the heroes and heroines who made the ultimate sacrifice for our country mostly during times of war and includes the 184 victims of the 9/11 terrorist attack on the Pentagon. Arlington Cemetery is a sight to behold! Rows after rows of white tombstones in perfect alignment stretched out across the fields and hills of green grass farther than our eyes could see. Thinking that each and every one of these tombstones represents a soldier and that each and every one of these soldiers had a family and is so loved and appreciated by our Heavenly Parent was almost unfathomable. Sarah Rendel, a participant of RYS, had a deep experience. Upon seeing these graves, she felt utterly grateful to all the fallen soldiers and to President Kennedy, whose grave we visited. Sarah said she was inspired to have a more desperate and fighting heart for God’s providence and to be even more serious to work for peace.

Later in the day, we rested in the shade of a small park before our next appointment at the Russian embassy. When we arrived at the Embassy of the Russian Federation, we were met by Ms. Natalia Dementieva, the cultural attaché who gave us a tour of the grandiose embassy building and served us scones and other refreshments, all the while charming us with her warmth and sense of humor. After watching several films about the nation, minister counselor Aydar Aganin spoke to us. His personality was so genuine; he acted as a father to us. Answering our various questions and also giving us advice, he left us with two main ideas; that everyone should look at themselves as students and that we should open our hearts to the world, and see and learn as much as we can. In the time that we spent with the people in the Russian embassy, we broke down some of the concepts that limit us and instead recognized their beautiful characters and how much God loves them.

The last planned activity for the day was a talk by our elder brother, Alex Cromwell, a 2nd gen who teaches courses on conflict resolution at George Mason University. Alex spoke on how we can use our passions and goals towards building peace in the world. Down to earth and real, he gave us guidance on how to build a world of peace by applying our core values to our passions and utilizing that to change the world through our careers. Something profound that he said is that we should “stop painting the face of the devil on each other’s face. We have to start realizing as individuals that everyone around the world is just like us, who are hurting and in pain but also have hopes and dreams of wanting something better for this world we live in. I, as well as many others, could feel his energy, passion, and drive in what he’s doing. It was inspiring and helped us realize how much is ahead of us in the future.

Being in RYS and meeting successful people who hold important positions and think with a large perspective gives us all hope for the future. These leaders from all over the world that we met stress the importance of breaking down the barriers of hate and fear. Meeting the people of the embassies of different nations with open hearts is our first step to understanding and loving each other, thus creating a world of familial love and peace. As Americans, we tend to always see America as the center of the world, but we are realizing that there is so much more out there to know that is unique and beautiful. It is our responsibility to seek and explore all the beauty in the world, in other people, countries, cultures, and religions, and understand that peace, love, and acceptance begins within ourselves.

May 27 – Friday

On the last-full day, we woke up early to be on time for morning worship service at the MedStar Washington Hospital Center Chapel. Chaplain Jerry McCallum warmly welcomed “the RYS and the Unification Church.” He delivered a sermon on the topic of “Happiness.” Chaplain McCallum said “in life we are given many challenges, and it might be difficult to be grateful in those moments, but we should regard these challenges as opportunities because God gives everything to us for a reason. We are the only ones who can choose happiness; no one else can bring it to you.”

It reminded me of something that Father Moon had said. “There is a fine line in between happiness and unhappiness. Even in the most miserable situations, we have to choose to be happy because God is more miserable, but we can bring Him joy if we are joyful and grateful.”

Fr. Anthony Akinlolu, director of the spiritual care department, gave an explanation about the value of spiritual care in the hospital setting. We were then given a guided tour through the hospital, and learned how the chaplains provide spiritual care to the patients, family, and staff. William Selig, a chaplain at the hospital, organized the program.

At the UPF Peace Embassy, Rev. Greg Carter supervised the service project which consisted of us planting flowers, pulling weeds, fixing the fence, and clearing the yard of logs, trash, and discarded items, including old furniture. The Peace Embassy was actually True Parent’s first house in America and the location of the first blessing in America. It was such an honor and joy to be cleaning up the place that has such providential importance. Externally, everyone worked very hard, and no one stopped even through the intense, sweltering heat. When we were able to connect our external experiences to the deeper meaning, it made our experiences more purposeful and relevant. We felt more energy and power the more we could invite God into every action. Our members affirmed their willingness to give themselves for the sake of God and True Parent’s glory. Through having that mindset, no matter how tired our muscles felt or how much sweat rolled down our faces, we were reminded of the heavenly life lesson that joy comes to those who work for a higher selfless purpose.

We ended the night with Hip-Hop Friday with the Imani Temple youth. Father Kevin Washington and Rev. Dana Tolliver explained the history of Hip-hop, and where it is now. He said that “Hip-hop was created to bring unity between different cultures; music was a way for these people to express themselves.” Ryota Naito, a participant of RYS said, “We are not limited from anyone or anything from expressing the God within us. Hip-hop is an expression. I resonated with the hearts of early African-Americans to just simply want to express themselves in times of difficulty. God must be so happy because He’s being expressed through it.” God gave us the opportunity to express ourselves, so we shouldn’t doubt ourselves. Father Washington also talked about the importance of unconditional love. The biggest point he made was that “we ask others to love us unconditionally, but do we love ourselves unconditionally without any judgments or doubts?” He stressed the importance of loving ourselves in order to give the best love to others.

It was the last full day of RYS, and the consensus among our group was that it was a day where we wanted to give rather than receive, especially through service. We’re so grateful because throughout the week, we received so much love and motivation to give more to the world. Through the service project, we wanted to give all the love we’ve received back, especially to God and True Parents. We want to incorporate the passion of wanting to act on our beliefs, and do something meaningful in our lives. We don’t want to limit ourselves, but to “dream big” and open our minds to believing that we have the potential to impact the world.

May 28 - Saturday

Graduation Day came after eight full days of vigorous and thought-provoking activity. The ceremony began at 9:30 am with a heartfelt prayer by Susan Fefferman followed by remarks from Dr. Selig, who served as the MC, and Mrs. Duggan.

Dr. Selig summarized the week and explained that all of the activities were designed to fit into the three pillars of RYS: Interfaith education, leadership development, and service. Mrs. Duggan expressed her sincere gratitude towards us. She shared that the training and memories we’ve received are treasures; we’ll never lose them because they are a part of us. We all feel so much gratitude towards her because throughout these eight days, she was our mother figure, always guiding and supporting us.

The ceremony continued with some of our own participants sharing their own experiences. Grace Roberts was inspired when she went to the Department of Education because she understood that interfaith education should begin early in life. By starting from the younger generation and helping them share their faith and beliefs then more genuine and lasting relationships will result. Another participant, Rebecca Bard expressed that at the memorials she experienced the spirits of the military veterans, but throughout the program, she met the veterans, she called, “Veterans for True Parents,” and she named Tomiko Duggan, William Selig, Susan Fefferman, and that all the other 1st gen members are veterans for True Parents. We could see how touched they were when their names were mentioned. We are so grateful because through these “veterans,” we were

able to experience our True Parents. Lastly, Kouki Tamura confessed that in the beginning it was difficult to understand why he was doing this program, but realized that the purpose was to attain happiness. “It’s our limits that stop us from seeing past the barriers. We must go beyond ourselves and see our motivation of heart!”

After we sang our offering song, the speakers were introduced. Rev. Dr. Doris T. McGuffey, founder of the Center for Dimensional Transformation Worldwide strongly suggested that we shouldn’t follow “Fool’s Gold” because these things distract us from the truth. “We must trust the truth because it will make us stronger, so that we won’t be affected by fool’s gold or the storms and difficulties that we encounter in life.”

Mr. Thomas McDevitt, who was appointed as chairman of UPF-USA just a month ago by True Mother, was the next guest speaker. As he shared, he was moved to tears. He said that Father met with the leaders of the Movement on a regular and monthly basis. Father emphasized three fundamental qualities to be a competent leader: (1) to be able to teach Divine Principle, Unification Thought, and Victory Over Communism, (2) to understand human relations, and (3) how to develop resources.

Mr. McDevitt said that “what we are believing and fighting for is real.” The first generation in the movement have gone through an arduous and painful course of sacrifice in order to create Cheon Il Guk in this world. Mr. McDevitt stated with conviction that “seeing everyone here now, it was all worth it. I would do it all over again. I would do it a thousand times over and even if I have to give up my life.” In closing he said that when meeting with True Mother recently, she said, “As Blessed members, your responsibility doesn’t end with the Blessing.” Mother said, “Have a vision to help everyone on the planet.”

Mrs. Nanae Goto sang “This Land is Mine,” (the “Exodus Song”) accompanied by beautiful PowerPoint images of True Parents and the MEPI program. Everyone was completely captivated by its spirit. The ceremony concluded with everyone being presented with the UPF Youth Ambassador for Peace certificate signed by Father and Mother.

Conclusion:

We all felt that in just a short eight days, we were able to gain more knowledge, inspiration, and love than we could ever have received in a university setting. Our hearts are full. We take with us many things.

We all felt a deeper appreciation for our nation and the men and women who sacrificed their lives for our freedoms and most assuredly, we felt a greater closeness to the first gen. We were reminded that they all joined this Movement at an early age, even younger than some of us, because they felt God’s love through True Parents and the Principle. We also want to feel that way and inherit that level of heart that goes beyond barriers of race, nationality, and even religion.

We are very grateful to the RYS staff, especially Mrs. Duggan, who was with us from the moment we arrived. She invested herself totally in loving and taking care of us. Her hope for us as future leaders gives us hope too. We begin to see our own potential to change this world in a way that we couldn't see clearly within ourselves before. The once-in-a-lifetime priceless experiences and memories on RYS are what we will hold on to, and to push guide us along the wonderful journey ahead of us.

For us, as reporters for this unique experience and representatives of our group, we want to thank Dr. Selig, "Uncle Bill," for his advice and support in preparing this report which we pray and hope will inform and inspire our families and others to understand RYS/GPA better and to consider participating with us.

Our thanks to everyone working behind the scenes who took care of us: Otmar Weinman, Yuriko Kitigawa, Nanae Goto, Keiko Patton, Hideko Aoyama.

We love you!

Yemi Grace Mock and Sasha Okon are first year participants of the Generation for Peace Academy (GPA).