

peacekeepers wanted

religious youth service
annual report
2007



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A Note from the International Director

Dear Friends,

2007 was another great year for the Religious Youth Service (RYS). Thanks to the work of our dedicated project developers and educators, we were able to provide an environment for many youth from around the world to rise above doctrinal differences, unite in activities of service learning, and develop leadership abilities that enable them to help in the creation of a culture of peace.

In 21 international programs and seminars, over 1000 young people from 40 countries had an opportunity to experience the stimulating interreligious and intercultural friendship building atmosphere of RYS and serve together for peace.

We have upgraded the website and standardized processes and operational systems. Take a closer look at www.rys.net.

Thanks to our staff for their continuous efforts, our committed project developers for their initiative, our advisory council for their input and dedication and the Universal Peace Federation for their continued spiritual and financial support.

Sincerely,



Daniel Bessell
Director RYS International



RELIGIOUS YOUTH SERVICE PROJECT MAP 2007

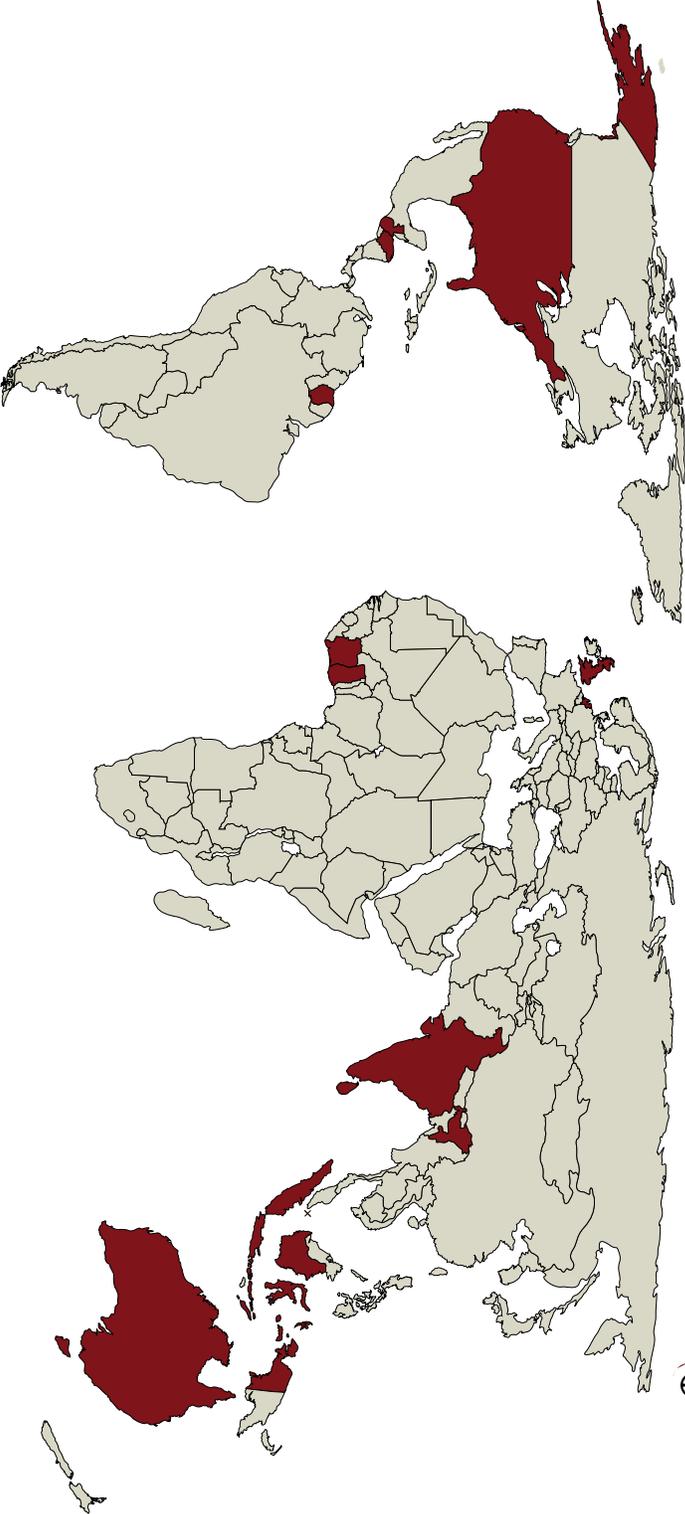
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RYS Projects

"RYS projects are experiential, social service-learning programs that stand as models for creating peace among the people of the world."



RYS Project
38 Participants
5 Staff Members
5 Religions
3 Nations

Inter-Cultural Religious Youth Camp
16 Participants
6 Staff Members
6 Religions
5 Nations



Sri Lanka | August 18-24, 2007

The Sri Lanka RYS took place in Ratnapura, a multi-faith city of Buddhists, Hindus, Muslims and Christians. Geographically Ratnapura is situated in an area of regular rainfall. Therefore it is abundant with natural beauty in the surrounding vicinity including a virgin tropical rain forest.

The work project was to build a study hall and to repair and upgrade the existing play area of the local orphanage which houses 22 boys, all less than 12 years old. Some enthusiastic participants arrived at the field to work hard at digging up the earth for the foundation and pillars, while a few other participants did landscaping.

The participants enjoyed visits to a Buddhist Temple and also took part in a Hindu ritual. They visited a gem mine and finished their stay in Sri Lanka in the rain forest.

Participants were paid a surprise visit by the son of the president of Sri Lanka, Mr. Namal Rajapakse, to greet all and to offer his good wishes on the project.

Indonesia | July 15-21, 2007

Indonesia is a multireligious, multicultural, and multiracial country. Recently, Indonesia faced multiple tragedies of nature, such as tsunami, floods, earthquakes, volcanic eruption, and hurricanes. These happened again and again – they destroyed and disrupted many facilities including homes, schools, public amenities, hospitals, clinics, etc. Many children lost their families, could not go to school, suffered poor health and worsening poverty.

Oftentimes, following such tragedies, we prioritize rebuilding houses and schools which are part of the infrastructure and we neglect the needs of the human beings themselves. Therefore, the project in Yogya was not simply the restoration of a school and the bonding of participants, but also the rebuilding of hope for the Principal of the preschool, the housewives, the people surrounding the project venue, and the teachers, as well as the young students.

There was deep appreciation for what RYS did for the school. The students and teachers felt grateful for RYS giving them a better atmosphere and a sense of spirituality. The Principal was motivated to do her best in the school as well as motivated to encourage the community surrounding the school to do recycling of house waste with the purpose of creating a cleaner environment and better life. It will also earn some extra money for the families.

RYS hopes that there will be other Indonesia projects in the future to spread the spirit of teamwork, the spirit of humanity, the spirit of living for the sake of others, and the spirit of making peace in Indonesia and in the world generally.



RYS Project
29 Participants
3 Staff Members
4 Religions
7 Nations

RYS/Service for Peace (collaborative)
15 Participants
4 Staff Members
3 Religions
5 Nations

Suriname | August 18-28, 2007

The Paramaribo Zoo in Suriname almost became dormant until Netherlander Rain Forest expert, Auke Heilkma, came to its rescue. With the help of our interreligious and intercultural youths from Suriname, Guyana, French Guyana, Trinidad and Tobago, Netherlands, USA, and Jamaica the Paramaribo Zoo is almost back. The Zoo is home to some 200 species of animals, with a wide variety of snakes, birds and monkeys.

Some RYS participants fed and cared for the animals, while others had the opportunity to do repairs, landscaping and cleaning. The houses of some animals were washed, some areas were painted, and picking up garbage made the zoo a litter-free zone. The group also set up seating areas for visitors to the zoo.

The second project was at the Fatima Oord, a home for the elderly. There the youths did landscaping and cleaning of the storerooms, and later took time to share stories with a few elderly ladies.

RYS participants also had an opportunity to invest themselves during visits to the Muslim and Christian communities in Paramaribo, and they delighted in the tour of the Presidential Palace. Many participants expressed gratitude for the great time they shared, the new friends they made and for all of their experiences; many wished it could have been longer. The project took on a form of cultural exchange in which the diverse culture of Suriname could be especially appreciated.



Honduras | Aug. 26 - Sept. 5, 2007

Fifteen volunteers and staff participated in Estralles para la Paz, RYS/Global Peacemaker project in Honduras. Participants had a special experience through “home stays,” that is, they were integrated through daily life with Honduran families who volunteered their homes and offered breakfast meals for each participant.

The service aspect of the project included landscaping, construction, painting and furnishing of a new kitchen in a community center, as well as supervising free-time activities for the children of the community of Colonia Nueva Suyapa, in the suburbs of Tegucigalpa. The kitchen will be used by an education center for local children. The local Mormon community donated all the utensils and appliances for the kitchen.

The participants were able to experience more of the religious atmosphere of Honduras when they attended a church service and gospel concert which was held at Gothic Basilica de Suyapa in honor of their work.

The community gave back to participants at the project closing. They received gifts, kind words and smiles. After the project closing, the educators and volunteers went into the reflection period. Each participant was awarded a Certificate of Participation and Appreciation.



RYS Project
21 Participants
4 Staff Members
4 Religions
4 Nations



Ivory Coast | September 8-22, 2007

The September 2007 Ivory Coast RYS project was the first held in a French speaking African country. The project included three main activities: Experiential peace-building education for the participants, the service project which impacted the local community, and the conferences between the UN offices and the RYS, creating partnership through its developing activities in the Ivory Coast.

Through the educational component of the project, the participants developed greater skill in working together as a community and understanding the necessity of living for the sake of others. The service helped the local community feel renewed hope in life. After 5 years of conflict, villagers were rejuvenated upon seeing people from far away come to their small home in the bush. The village women demonstrated their beautiful hearts by bringing food in the night, and firewood to prepare the food, as well as fetching water each day for participants' needs. The local youth also joined the volunteer activities.

In response to the community's kindness, all the participants visited each family in the three villages. In joy and gratitude the local community gave them gifts from their harvest and from their farms.

RYS Project
34 Participants
3 Staff Members
4 Religions
9 Nations

Ghana | April 7-17, 2007

Participants from diverse faiths and nine countries came together for a service project in Tinkong in the Eastern Region. The ten-day service, education and cultural program was full of work and happiness in which every individual gave unselfishly (to the admiration of the whole community), irrespective of religious, economic, social or racial background.

Participants with little or no construction experience worked with the assistance and support of local artisans, masons, and carpenters to renovate the six classrooms of the District Assembly Junior Secondary School. They constructed new walls, installed new wooden window frames and screened the floors.

The educational directors from the USA, Ana and Kelly, together with local RYS project director, Mr. Kerim Tseney, gave their best to make the participants' stay a joyful and memorable one. Early mornings were used for participants' spiritual upliftment. Besides the work projects, participants also had time for relaxation and visited local waterfalls in the region. Experiential, academic, character and moral education formed part of the evening programs. The Ghana RYS family served together in peace, love and understanding until their day of departure back to various home countries. Some could not believe that the time to say, "Goodbye until we meet again" came so soon. Such is life—meeting and departing.



RYS/Service for Peace (collaborative)
22 Participants
4 Staff Members
6 Religions
9 Nations

RYS Project
40 Participants
6 Staff Members
5 Religions
4 Nations



Israel | December 7-14, 2007

Religious Youth Service in conjunction with Service for Peace–Israel, implemented a 5-days Experiential Social Service Learning project for the International Volunteer Day. The project gave 22 interreligious participants from various cultural backgrounds and origins a chance to interact, to learn more about each other and the power of acting together, and about joining forces in the action of a common service for a common goal.

The Project included both a service and a learning perspective. The service took the form of artwork, decorating the walls in two community centers in Jerusalem. One project was held in East Jerusalem, having a predominantly Arab population, and one was carried out on the boundary line between East and West Jerusalem where there is a predominantly Jewish neighborhood. The participants and local youth worked together painting the walls in the community centers, making them more pleasant for children and young people.

The educational part of the project included workshops, training sessions, and reflection upon the service. The training sessions were based on one of the most effective nonformal educational methods, namely experiential learning. Participants gained leadership skills, deeper understanding of themselves and of the others, and of how to actualize joint efforts and undertake small community service projects in their own communities. They reflected on the concepts of human rights, peace and joint action for development.

As a result, the participants who completed the project were highly motivated to continue their service efforts and to undertake their own service projects in their communities. Another result of the project was that the local young people in the two community centers were involved in the decoration and care for their centers and gained a vital sense of contributing to their communities.

Nepal | October 9-17, 2007

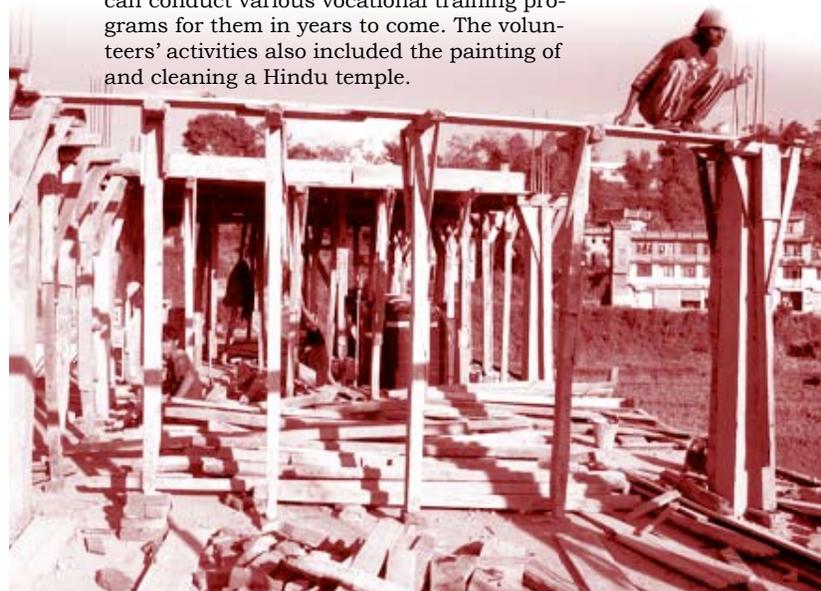
The Nepal Religious Youth Service Project was held successfully October 9-17, 2007 in the ancient village of Bungamati, Lalitpur. A total of 40 local and international participants from Sri Lanka, Pakistan, England, Nepal and Jordan, representing different faiths, culture, and ethnic backgrounds, attended the project.

“This was an amazing experience.” marveled Tej Maya Maharjan, one young participant from Nepal, “working together with other young people from different backgrounds, faiths and cultures, clearing the differences among us by living together and making friendships during and after the RYS service project”.

Participants developed strong communication and friendship through their experiences, thus overcoming doubts about each other’s religious beliefs and cultural traditions.

The many facets of the Nepal RYS experience, including yoga and meditation, the service work and education, interreligious site visits to a church, mosque, temple and monastery, plus the cultural sightseeing, all reinforced the message of interreligious harmony by “Bridging over Barriers.”

RYS supported building a multipurpose Community Hall at the Buddhist monastery, Amarapur Vihar, where Buddhist nuns have lived for the past decades serving the people, and maintaining harmony and peace within the local community. This monastery had limited space to serve the children and youth. The RYS 2007 Nepal volunteers worked at building and painting the community hall for underprivileged children. Now the children have enough space to attend classes regularly and the monastery can conduct various vocational training programs for them in years to come. The volunteers’ activities also included the painting of and cleaning a Hindu temple.





Celebrations of Life

"Every moment of life is worth a celebration. If you have not appreciated life and its precious moments, it is time to do so."
-Simran Khurana

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Singapore | March 19, 2007

Building Bridges Through Service

As a follow-up to the “Celebration of Life” event in Singapore in January, Nova Certeza soccer club brought 20 multi-faith students from the National Institute of Singapore to do a one-day community service at the Muhammadiyah Center on February 8, 2007.

The Muhammadiyah Association, the students and Nova Certeza sponsored the event.

Singapore | March 23-25, 2007

Building Bridges Through Service II

This was the first time Nova Certeza engaged in an RYS community service project in Kuala Lumpur. Athletics went to a clinic in Puchong and worked clearing drains and cleaning the surrounding compound. They cleared and removed dried leaves and unwanted woods.

The adviser of the clinic, Mr. Hamdan, was very surprised to see a soccer club engaged in this kind of activity.

In University Technology of Mara (UiTM), the deputy dean and lecturer Mr. Rahim Meerah, who is also one of the IPSF alumni, gave a warm welcome. The athletes were given a brief introduction to the university and a short tour, followed by a friendly match with UiTM soccer team.

Another friendly match was played against Caisavani F.C. which was comprised of Hindu players. Despite being different in religious affiliations, the athletics still could play respectfully on the same field.

Other activities were organized by Shanta Venugopal (IPSF alumnus), and Dr. Teh (IPSF alumnus) from World CARP gave a short talk about promoting peace. The Celebration of Life project strengthened the ties between Singapore and Malaysia alumni for future cooperation.

Singapore | April 7-8, 2007

Building Bridges through Sports and Service

The January “Celebration of Life” event in Singapore inspired the organizers, Nova Certeza and Muhammadiyah to hold another such event on April 7-8, 2007. The Muhammadiyah Association in Singapore, which has a membership of more than two thousand, celebrated their 50th anniversary on April 8th.

Therefore, Muhammadiyah and Nova Certeza will be organizing a “Celebration of Life” in conjunction with this anniversary. “Celebrations of Life” are projects which partner sister organization Religious Youth Service (RYS) with the Interreligious Peace Sports Festival (IPSF). It celebrates the values found in sports and service, working together as a team and living for the sake of others, respectively; and jointly having fun and creating peace in community with others.



RYS Peace Parks

“RYS Peace Park Projects use art as the vehicle of service.”

RYS Peace Park
15 Participants
3 Staff Members
3 Religions
6 Nations

RYS Peace Park
19 Participants
4 Staff Members
8 Religions
5 Nations

Netherlands | July 28 - August 7, 2007

“Bridging the gap between religious and cultural differences” was the motto which brought 20 young people from different cultures and faiths together in Utrecht, the Netherlands for an interfaith service project. It was a 10-day project organized by Youth Service Initiative, a youth volunteer group and Religious Youth Service and was carried out in partnership with the city of Utrecht and supported by Kerk en Wereld.

The project aimed at providing an opportunity for these young people from different faiths to serve the local community and, in doing so, to come to a deeper understanding and appreciation of the faiths of the other participants. The participants worked with the local Social Center, Doenja Dienstverlening, to create a peace mosaic at a playground in Kanaleneiland, a neighborhood in Utrecht, and also at De Paraplu, a center for handicapped people.

These projects stimulated the participants to unite and gave the group an opportunity to connect with the local neighborhood, working with children, youth and handicapped adults at the project site. Working together for one week on these artistic projects brought everyone closer together and engendered deep friendships among the participants and local residents.



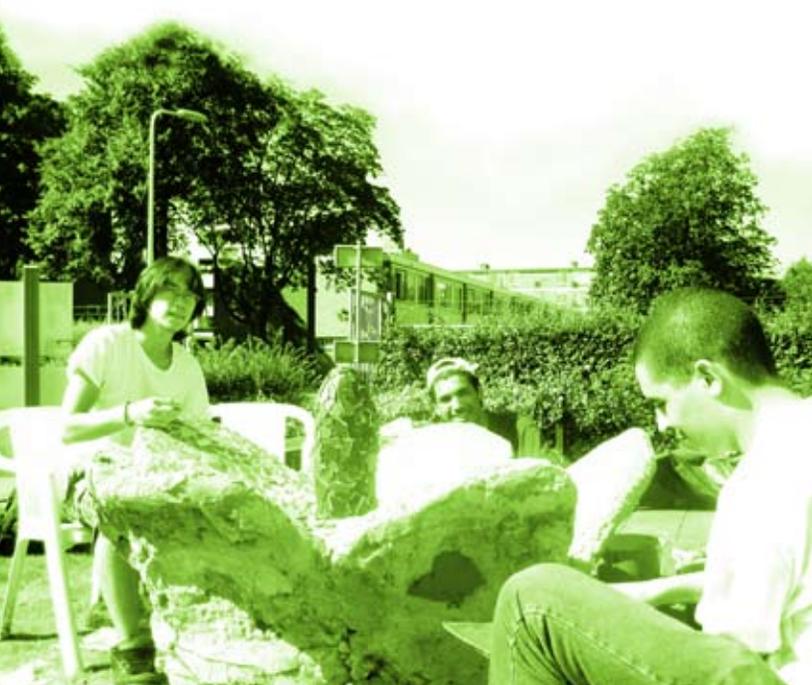
USA | August 10-19, 2007

The focus of this service project was to set precedents for future innovative community development initiatives in the United States. The vision of RYS, in conjunction with USPP (United Service Projects for Peace), is to address both national and international concerns by transcending perceived barriers and developing a unified community concerned with the welfare of the one human family.

Throughout this project we partnered with numerous nonprofit and government organizations including: Greater Newark Conservancy (landscaping), The Boys & Girls Club (playground renovations, outdoor mural, area clean-up, equipment donations, peace garden), Newark Housing Authority (Wynona Lipman Gardens landscaping), Newark Now (Super Summer), and WISOMMM (Women In Support of the Million Man March). In addition, we dedicated time to street/sidewalk cleanup (Olivier Street area, Broad Street area, Avon Avenue area), filling over 50 trash bags, totaling over 2000 gallons of trash.

Under the supervision of a professional mosaic artist (Lois Ramunni), we completed three peace/diversity mosaics that were donated to the City of Newark. The mosaics were unveiled at a ceremony at City Hall and were hung at the Boylan and Rotunda Recreation Centers, and in the WISOMMM Cultural Center. The mosaics portrayed the City of Newark's commitment to peace, harmony, diversity, and its hope to bring love and healing to all its residents.

Participants and staff also attended a Community Memorial Healing Vigil, The Fresh Anointing International Church, Spiritual Unity Day, and Community Neighborhood Concert Series (in Newark, NJ).





Seminars & Other Activities

"RYS Seminars are educational meetings that are conducted in classroom style, imparting RYS methodology and training concepts."



USA | February 27, 2007 "RYS Speaker Presents at the UN"

On February 27, 2007, Mrs. Rajashwari Menon, educator and Principal of SBOA school in India, spoke to a group of about 150 individuals who participated in a Parallel Event Workshop, part of the 51st session of the Commission on the Status of Woman. The event was cosponsored by Women's Federation for World Peace International, Bridgeport International Academy and Religious Youth Service.

The workshop presented best practices in the fields of education and cross-cultural exchange service work that has succeeded in transforming cultural, ethical and religious value systems to enhance the status of the girl child. The practices presented facilitate acceptance of the diverse potentials of girl children.

Mrs. Menon's paper focused on the importance of values education, in particular in India, as a means of improving the status of the girl child. She spoke not only about education that is needed by young girls to develop their sense of value and self-esteem, but also about the reality that, to truly make the necessary changes, young boys and entire communities must adjust the way they think about women to liberate them to fulfill their proper role in society.

Australia | March 19, 2007 "The Perth Talks"

A talk was given on "How to break down barriers through Service and Sports" during Harmony Day, March 17, 2007. More than 50 attended the talk.

Another talk was given to 700 students and teachers at Presbyterian Ladies College, Perth on "Youths and Intercultural/faith Harmony: Methods" on March 19, 2007.

Netherlands | March 24-28, 2007 "Meeting the Youth Service Initiative"

Presently based in the Netherlands, The Youth Service Initiative (YSI) is a group of seven international youth dedicated to "creating a youth culture of service by encouraging young people to take initiative in their community." Their final project, in culmination of the year, is to prepare their own service activity in their respective country. Hence, in preparation for their "personal projects, the group invited Ron Burr and a team of RYS staff to hold an RYS "Train the Trainers" program on facilitating experiential education.

The RYS staff was very impressed with the youths' ability to grasp the RYS training in such a short period. The success of the program has given rise to discussions regarding future collaboration on activities.

India | April 14, 2007

"We Are One"

With great spirit and enthusiasm for youth welfare and religious harmony, the RYS, together with the Universal Peace Federation (UPF) and Ambassadors for Peace, organized a one-day interreligious program for young people from Loyola College, Chennai, India. The RYS continues to make strong efforts to establish a better place for youth to live, free from communal and racial barriers. Many professors from the college also participated in this meeting to enrich themselves on this most important area of study.

Mr. Shine Jose, who is the backbone of RYS in Chennai, promotes religious harmony with an indomitable spirit. Nearly 30 students, both girls and boys from Loyola College, Chennai attended.

Guatemala | April 30, 2007

"Social Cooperation for Better Leadership and Development in Guatemala"

Seventy-three representatives from various volunteer and service organizations gathered together with Guatemalan academics and two speakers from the United States in the Embassy for Peace in Guatemala on April 30, 2007. The 3 1/2-hour conference, structured in panel-forum style, was sponsored by Guatemala Pro Peace Association (APPG), Religious Youth Service (RYS), and Service for Peace (SFP). One result of the conference was the decision to work on establishing the International Day of Peace in Guatemala, to be celebrated every September 21st, which is also the International Day of Peace established by the United Nations as a volunteer and service day.

Australia | June 23, 2007

"World Peace through Interreligious Action"

On the 23rd of June 2007, a one-day RYS project was held at Sir Joseph Banks High School in Revesby, Australia. The school, categorized as one of the most disadvantaged in the State, was in need of a helping hand or two in tasks such as the cleaning, covering of books and construction of a garden in the courtyard and driveway areas.

Volunteers were made up of several representatives of the school students as well as teachers and the Principal himself. About 45 youths and elders from different religious faiths participated in community service. There were people from different religious backgrounds including Christians and Sikhs.

The day went well, beginning with an introduction to RYS given by Rick McInerheney and an overview of the school's situation from the Principal. After morning tea, work began straight away. Boys were sent to the garden and girls were assigned to clean the corridors and cover books.

Interaction between the different communities was very positive with participants feeling enjoyment in the work and satisfaction in seeing the work complet-



ed, especially in regard to the garden where several hundred kilograms of earth and bark were moved and saplings arranged and planted.

This task in particular was one that improved the look of the school as well as the spirit of its members and staff who were very grateful for the involvement of the Religious Youth Service and inspired by the organization's motivation and goals. As heralded in the motto "World Peace through Interreligious Action" and demonstrated through the willingness of the project's participants, dedication to such causes is instrumental in bringing about racial and religious harmony.

Australia | July 20-22, 2007

"Moving Forward and Making Things Happen"

WATAC (Women and the Australian Church) organizes an annual conference each year. About 300 people from various ecumenical backgrounds came to this WATAC conference in Sydney. They came from all walks of life, including students, missionaries and NGOs.

The keynote speaker Sister Joan Chittister spoke about the crucial need to move forward and to make things happen. To do this, the very concept of true prayers and what constitutes a church should be expanded to include action. Realizing this vision demands a paradigm shift of going beyond self. She emphasized the need to recognize young people as the vehicle of change, inasmuch as they are the future.

Fazida Razak was invited to share at the conference with Sister Margaret Finlay and Sister Marie Theresa who are both RYS alumni. She followed the keynote address, speaking about new methodologies in building bridges between young people of faith. She said that the old methodology using dialogue and conference to build bridges is more suitable for the older generation and may not work for youth who have more energy and interest in hands-on activity. She gave examples of interfaith works done around the world that use community service, educational visits to religious places of worship, and sports as new tools to enhance engagement.

Fazida also emphasized that any organization that

wants to embark on such work be willing to embrace all religions as the basic foundation for interfaith work. She stressed that organizing interfaith work should not be dominated by any one single faith; rather, it should be coordinated by various groups of different faiths establishing trust and shared credit.

England | September 1, 2007

“Setting the Foundation for Peace”

The Religious Youth Service (RYS) UK, Service for Peace (SFP) Luxembourg and A Taste of Our Culture based in the UK, planned and carried out this exciting one-day project on September 1, 2007 to launch the Global Peace Festival in the UK.

The day consisted of three parts: an orientation and leadership training at the local Peace Embassy in Thornton Heath, South London from 10 am until noon, a period of art service work and, finally, a special closing session.

After a welcome and introduction, the 30 participants heard a number of inspiring talks by community activists Omar Richards and Saffron Jackson. That was followed by a special session on “How to Optimize Success!” by Massimo Trombin of SFP Luxembourg. Thereafter, Marshall de Souza, RYS UK trainer, divided the group into five teams and led them into designing their “vision for peace” posters. This turned out to be a really worthwhile and rewarding experience for everyone.

Lunch was provided by the Peace Embassy. Then participants walked to the Mini VIP Nursery to paint a mural on the wall and fence of the nursery. A few youth stayed behind to design and paint a beautiful banner entitled: “Setting the Foundation for Peace”.

Everyone gathered back at the Peace Embassy for refreshments and a closing ceremony. Linette Richards, a distinguished Ambassador for Peace, presented Certificates of Attendance to the participants giving recognition to their valuable service to the community.

So much was achieved in such a short space of time. As the banner team indicated, this group has set the foundation for peace. Hopefully, more projects will be organized; more youth from different backgrounds will have the opportunity to work together, serve the community, make true friendships and break down barriers in the process – This was true peace-building!



Australia | September 11, 2007

“Remembering September 11 in Australia”

In remembrance of the sad event of September 11, six years ago, 19 women of Christian and Muslim faiths and from 5 nationalities came together to share and pray on Tuesday, September 11, 2007 in Perth, Australia at the Lady Mission headquarters.

Co-organized by Australian RYS alumni and the Lady Mission, the objective was to allow the group to share from their hearts how September 11 has impacted them. They all agreed that they were impacted by the event regardless of their faiths and nationalities. Marg Finlay said that she and many of her friends had never interacted with Muslims prior to the event but, after the event, she realized that it is unhealthy to disassociate. And she was pleased to attend the first RYS in Perth because it opened up possibilities for her and her group to begin to actively relate with Muslims.

Although many in the gathering agreed that the climate of fear has heightened, they were also determined to make a shift toward making new friends. Fazida Razak observed that, with September 11, many NGOs have sprung up with the sole objective to promote increased understanding between faiths.

In addressing the impact of this act of terror, the women were divided into smaller groups of four where they discussed the concept of justice in their faiths and how they could draw from each other’s strengths and traditions.

The group then offered an interfaith prayer for peace and then shared quotes from Buddhist, Christian and Muslim scriptures.

Guatemala | November 5-10, 2007

Guatemala Peace Vacation

RYS Training was given to 20 young teachers in preparation for them to receive 200 children registered to attend a Peace—Vacation, a six-week sports program designed by the Ministry of Peace.

Trainer Carol Pobanz, supported by the competent translation of Sung Hwa Bessell, who was also one of the project organizers, adapted the RYS service-learning orientation to accommodate the needs and vision of the Peace Vacation program. The young teachers enjoyed the program as they were taken through exercises which both helped them understand peacebuilding activities as well as illustrated the methodology used to facilitate experiential learning.

The training program lasted through the morning for 5 consecutive days. Other speakers for the program included Romulo Rojas – Asst. Director of the Dept. of Culture of Peace at the Guatemala Ministry of Peace, Nathan Hardeman – Assoc. Director of MI-GLOFUT (Global Soccer Ministries) and Luis Navarro – General Coordinator of the Peace Vacation Program.