

Anti-Nuclear Declaration Is Theme of Upcoming Exchange

By RON BAIRD, Bureau Chief

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San Francisco is gearing up for the 4th U.S.–Japan Youth Peace Exchange, which commemorates the 40th anniversary of second Soka Gakkai president Josei Toda's declaration against nuclear weapons. Eighty-eight youth from Japan will arrive in San Francisco on Aug. 12, traveling then to Dallas and Los Angeles as well.

For the San Francisco youth, the exchange has actually already begun. About a hundred of them sent postcards to the Japanese youth as a kind of advance welcome, and districts hosting exchange meetings are contacting their future Japanese guests now. The Tokyo youth replied with a card of their own, saying, "We are deeply touched by your sincerity and are eagerly looking forward to seeing you back home in San Francisco."

The Japanese youth have also shared that through this exchange they hope to refresh their determination to fight for peace and human rights, together with America, in the spirit of Toda's declaration.

The San Francisco youth are also working to create their own anti-nuclear declaration to present to their Japanese friends.

Preparations in San Francisco have been going on for the last two months, with 30–40 members meeting nearly every week.

"I'm excited and happy to see so many people involved," says Stephanie Pappas, who's coordinating the welcome dinner. "The members are really fired up! This meeting has a life of its own. People feel that 'since we're doing all this, let's make a determination for world peace! This meeting has got to make a difference!' We have the feeling that when we do gongyo together, we can change the world."

Joe Stevens agrees that this meeting is different from any he has prepared in the past. "Every other large activity I've been in started about a week before," he says. "We've hung together all this time and still retained the same level of excitement."

Mr. Stevens is putting together a mini-musical and explains that all the performers are involved in planning. "This has really brought the performers into the meeting," he says.

The visiting members have all worked hard just to come here, Mr. Stevens feels. "We have to give them something meaningful," he says. "The most exciting part will be at the end, to see the members' faces."

For those preparing for this event, it is already a huge success.

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