

## **Teen Leaders Create New Visions for Their Future**

**By PAUL CHU, teen Correspondent**

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Four short days and three long nights at the Florida Nature and Culture Center, and the lives of almost 160 youths changed forever. They re-evaluated themselves. They took a different outlook on their future and a different attitude toward the world. And they began to create a new vision of the SGI.

“Those of us who have the opportunity to be here, have the opportunity to change the world, so that when we are parents, our teenagers won’t have to face the same challenges,” said Emi Gwin of San Diego, who noted that teenagers today face the “toughest times in history.”

The 2nd Junior High and High School Divisions Leaders Conference held this weekend brought together a group of young people from across the country who are living these times while practicing Buddhism. They feel the same pressures as many other teenagers in society do and struggle through the same obstacles of life.

One of the conference’s main themes was “Creating a Vision” of the SGI organization that will reflect their dreams and the needs of the future. During one open mike session, volunteers spontaneously shared their visions, which took the form of strong statements of appreciation, including a rap poem, which brought participants to their feet in applause.

“My vision is such an intense thing to put into words,” said Ivan Meyreles of San Francisco. “I struggle to understand what SGI President Ikeda’s mission is, not just the theoretical side but the practical aspect of his vision. We cannot achieve the practical side unless we break down the barriers. To have no restrictions, to have absolute freedom. When President Ikeda came in 1990, he was trying to develop an organization where young people will have the power to break down all the barriers, so that we don’t restrict our potentialities. I hope that all of us here go back to our organizations and use this conference as momentum of hope for the future.”

“My vision has changed since I came to the FNCC,” said Jason Berg of New Jersey. “I thought I understood President Ikeda’s vision for us, but in coming here I realize his vision is a lot bigger: That each member should become a capable member in society, that we should develop into people that take responsibility for their lives, that we have the power to pursue our dreams and hopes. My vision is that the junior high and high school divisions in New Jersey connect with President Ikeda.”

Since January, the national junior high and high school leaders have been working with joint territory leaders via teleconferences to plan the conference.

Dialogues, panel discussions, lectures, presentations and social activities were held. Some organizational leadership issues were discussed, including guidelines and policies on consent forms, fundraising and event planning. Participants also shared ideas on how to create valuable relationships among themselves, with parents and with other divisions. In one session, they were asked to give suggestions on creating a nationwide study curriculum for the junior high and high school divisions.

Vice General Director Greg Martin gave a lecture on “The Mind and Body Relationship,” which especially captivated listeners, interweaving visual handouts with stimulating oratory that emphasized critical thinking and questioning one’s beliefs.

“Through the lecture,” said Wayne Thomas Jr. of New York, “everyone could gain some fundamental understanding of why we go through our daily obstacles and how to take the necessary steps to overcome them.”

An encouraging presentation also was given by San Francisco members on the success

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of their study group. "I had never taken the study part [of my practice] so seriously, until I came here," said Joe Castro Jr. of Los Angeles. "Now I know if you study it guides you, it gives you courage and strength to really keep fighting."

Throughout their time at the FNCC, the participants opened their lives to each other and shared their dreams and hopes, creating instant bonds of friendship.

"I really felt people's sincere determinations to overcome their karma and fight for kosen-rufu," said Boston member Jomo Thorne. "I was touched by everyone's honesty and sincerity; it was encouraging to hear that we all have the same struggles."

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