

**THE 8TH MEN'S DIVISION CONFERENCE AT THE FNCC (AUG. 24–27)  
A GATHERING OF THE BODHISATTVAS OF THE EARTH  
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“The Bodhisattvas of the Earth / have emerged! / They have arisen!” writes Shin’ichi Yamamoto in his new poem, dedicated to “my sublime fellow SGI members in America,” and I could not help but feel the profound reality of his words in the MD Conference this past week. One hundred and eighty men—from every corner of the U.S. and the Caribbean, from ages 39 to 74, from all kinds of ethnic and cultural backgrounds, from six months of practice in the SGI to well over 30 years—gathered together to refresh their faith and practice and to take the next step forward in fulfilling their unique and noble missions.

The program itself was outstanding, including a talk by Danny Nagashima on the mentor–disciple relationship, heartfelt experiences from some of the national men’s leaders, study and discussion of Soka Spirit and “Soar” in terms of our mission as Bodhisattvas of the Earth, several extended opportunities to meet and discuss topics in small groups and really get to know and encourage one another, and a magnificent (well, some of it) talent show. But above all, for me, it was the amazing, courageous and wonderful members who inspired me and showed me something of the meaning of SGI President Ikeda’s poem.

I’d like to share some of the highlights for me, but first, a small “commercial”: I had been present at the opening of the FNCC in 1996, and I saw the kind of effort President Ikeda made to ensure that every aspect of the place, even the details of the facility itself, would be encouraging and refreshing to the precious members who would come there. I heard from everyone who came back from a conference, regardless of the topic, how remarkable the experience was, but I myself had not been to a conference until now. Now, I, like several of the men who shared their determinations on our departure day, can say, “This was my first, but definitely not my last.” Once again, with the united efforts of many members and the FNCC staff (thanks!), one portion of President Ikeda’s vision has become a reality.

Some highlights:

- I met...a man who supported his wife and children while she won her bout with cancer; a man who had battled cancer himself; a man who suddenly lost a beloved grandchild; a man who struggled in business with his family; a man who fought and gathered 18 youth in his district where there had been only two; a man who fought to overcome a fierce drug addiction and now works to help others in his community; a man with many children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren and the spirit of a joyful and hope-filled youth making a fresh start...all unique, common people battling for kosen-rufu amidst the harsh realities of life.

- Danny Nagashima on the mentor–disciple relationship: In Buddhism, mentor and disciple are fundamentally equal and inseparable—we may have different roles, but we are not mere followers—because we take responsibility for achieving the same goal.

- I met...a man who overcame a seemingly unbridgeable gap in communication with a family member; a man who struggles to share himself openly with others; a man dedicated to rooting out racism in his workplace and community; a man who pledged to truly appreciate his wife....

- A group discussion on relationships, which, because of the breadth of experiences and determinations expressed, really brought home the joy and the importance of challenging ourselves first in everything.

- I met...a man whose efforts in the Soka Spirit movement led to great growth in his district and professional opportunity; a man who fought to participate everywhere using a walker so that his victory was not having to be wheeled in a chair as at previous conferences; a group of men who danced a proud and beautiful dance of independence....

Space prevents my going on. I truly felt this was a magnificent gathering of Bodhisattvas of the Earth. It was with joy but no surprise that I learned two days after returning that we had accomplished our SGI-USA target of having more than 10,000 men active during the Commemorative General Meetings nationwide: The men's division of America have arisen!