

**CAMPOUT REVEALS PHYSICAL, SPIRITUAL COURAGE
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Rope and rock climbing, canoeing, fishing and dialogue were but some of the fun activities featured in the annual Washington, D.C., Junior High/High School Summer Campout Aug. 18–20. The youth gathered at a campground in beautiful, rural Maryland, strongly determined to encourage one another, connect with the SGI organization and SGI President Ikeda, strengthen the basics of faith, practice and study and develop their friendships.

The young people encouraged one another at every turn—cheering a friend to make it to the top of the rock climbing wall, working together to complete a ropes course, applauding one another’s performances at the talent show or lending a sympathetic ear when a young person shared some of his or her personal struggles.

By the time the discussion groups got under way, even those who hadn’t known a single other person there before the weekend had grown comfortable enough to speak up. During a dialogue on how to talk to friends about Buddhism, 13-year-old Diar Chichester spoke bravely about his personal hell in school when he discovered that his Buddhist beliefs made him unaccepted in his environment. Encouraged by his friendships with the other members to realize that others go through the same struggles, Diar resolved never to give up his practice of Buddhism.

With such breakthroughs in friendship and in faith, the purpose of the campout had been accomplished. Ariana Bock, JH/HS region leader, remarked: “This is what makes the SGI such a unique youth organization. Through profound dialogue we can share and learn from each person’s courageous practice.”

During discussions on mentoring, several youth expressed their deep respect and admiration for people in their lives who had suffered much but were still strong mentors for them. Other lively discussions concerned Victory Over Violence as well as Soka Spirit and the history of Nichiren Daishonin’s Buddhism.

The finale was a video and presentation about the new Soka University of America campus in Aliso Viejo, Calif., opening May 3, 2001. Steve Wunder, young men’s region leader, expressed his determination, saying: “SUA, AV is President Ikeda’s dream for America. Let’s work together to make this dream a reality for the sake of America and the entire world!”