

**SOKA SPIRIT CONFERENCE HELD IN PHILADELPHIA
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The Philadelphia Region Soka Spirit Conference, held Jan. 12–14 at the Philadelphia Community Center, was the first conference of its type held at the region level in the United States. Its purpose was to enable Philadelphia Region members to better understand the issues regarding Nichiren Shoshu and the SGI.

The word *conference* tends to sound formal, which this gathering was not. It was like a conference at the Florida Nature and Culture Center, with a relaxed and congenial atmosphere. Dozens of SGI-USA members attended the conference for round-table discussions or lectures to better understand the Soka Spirit.

SGI-USA Soka Spirit Youth Leader Jeff Farr and Vice Study Department Leader Shin Yatomi traveled from Los Angeles to lecture and facilitate large-scale discussions. There were always two activities occurring at the same time. For example, on Friday night, while Jeff met with chapter, area and region leaders for a discussion, Shin gave a presentation for the Soka Spirit leaders on the “Encouraging Devotion” chapter of the Lotus Sutra and the concept of the three powerful enemies.

“Because Nichiren Daishonin was empowering the people, he was persecuted,” said Shin during his lecture. “The authorities couldn’t understand him. The members of the SGI have inherited this mission from the Daishonin.”

“Soka Spirit is an education movement,” said Jeff at a meeting with youth. “We can gain tremendous benefit by facing this problem. One purpose of Soka Spirit is to deepen our understanding of Buddhism.”

Many left the conference feeling refreshed, having returned to the basics of Buddhism through dialogue and presentations. There was a sense of genuine equality among the leaders, general members and even a few guests who attended. It was a different kind of learning experience, in which study, encouragement and camaraderie were mingled together.

“This was a dream come true,” said Mid-Atlantic Zone Soka Spirit Leader Rita Marlo. “It was a breakthrough opportunity for Philadelphia members to refresh their spirit and deepen their understanding of what the Daishonin’s Buddhism is truly about.”