

**GAY, LESBIAN, BISEXUAL, TRANSGENDER AND SUPPORTERS  
CONFERENCE AT THE FNCC  
THE MOON IS OVER THE CAPITAL BY LINDA THORNBURG  
CORRESPONDENT**

The moon rose full over Toda Lake, greeting those who had come to the SGI-USA's first Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender and Supporters Conference at the Florida Nature and Culture Center, March 8–11.

The participants gathered from across the United States, and some even came from England, Australia, France, Italy, Switzerland and St. Martin. They ranged in age from 19 to 65 and were of every beautiful hue and color of the human rainbow.

SGI-USA Vice General Director Greg Martin congratulated attendees by quoting Nichiren Daishonin's "Letter to Niike," saying: "The journey from Kamakura to Kyoto takes twelve days. If you travel for eleven but stop with only one day remaining, how can you admire the moon over the capital?" (*The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, p. 1027). The moon is over the capital. Congratulations—you have persevered."

Many had traveled long, spiritual journeys, transforming with faith the sufferings of isolation, ridicule and abuse into fuel for building lives of joy and deep compassion. That profound faith was acknowledged and celebrated.

Such an acknowledgement and celebration were years in the making. GLBT members had so often heard that their faith was "shallow and self-centered" because they had not used it to change their sexuality. From the outset of the conference, it was clear there was a new direction in the SGI-USA organization that these members had given much of their lives to transform, simply to include them as they are.

SGI-USA General Director Danny Nagashima opened his remarks saying: "This conference is a reflection of your hearts and your sense of determination. That all of you gathered here, at this time, is not a coincidence." He apologized for the "lack of understanding" and the "many difficult times."

He compared these members' struggles with the civil rights movement of the 1960s, saying that people who lead the way for human rights are often persecuted but that their efforts will be recognized as people look back in 40 or 50 years. "What we do here today will be felt instantly around the world," he said.

Cheers of gratitude and tears of healing flowed with the reading of President Ikeda's message (see box), through the memorial for members lost to HIV/AIDS, ignorance and neglect, and through the very last heart-opening experience. The participants affirmed their profound mission to embrace and celebrate their lives as they are, eradicating the self-doubt, misunderstanding, and hatred that mark homophobia.

Greg Martin said he was transformed: "I was made more deeply aware of the great courage GLBT members have to have just to be themselves. I am more deeply aware of the depths of their struggles, even facing physical danger, simply for being who they are."

Linda Johnson, SGI-USA vice women's leader, who had given endless hours of encouragement at the conference, thanked participants for their honesty and faith. "You have a profound mission," she said, "to show people who believe they have limitations that there are none."