

**SGI-USA FAMILY YOUTH FESTIVALS
STAYING FOCUSED ON THE BIG PICTURE
BY JAMES HERRMANN
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SGI-USA Youth Leader James Herrmann explains the significance and focus of this summer's 43 SGI-USA family youth festivals.

Thank you for all of your efforts so far this year! Summer is already upon us. Our movement to host 43 family youth festivals across the nation has already begun. In the midst of our struggle, it's easy for us to lose sight of the big picture—in other words, what are the youth trying to accomplish?

Our goals for this movement are:

- Joyful propagation of Buddhism
- Appointing young women's and young men's leaders in every SGI-USA district
- Fully supporting the Soka Spirit movement
- Complete success of the seven youth conferences at the Florida Nature and Culture Center this year

“A truly great person is a friend to those in suffering, pain and misery,” says SGI President Ikeda. “Such a person can be called a ‘leader of the new century’” (*Discussions on Youth*, vol. 1, p. 17).

With the great desire to afford our friends, families and acquaintances the opportunity to enjoy true happiness and fulfillment, we are taking the lead to spread the Mystic Law across America, displaying our pride as disciples of President Ikeda.

In his message for May 3, the start of the second set of Seven Bells—a time that I feel signifies the beginning of the American youth taking the lead in propagation—President Ikeda quotes Nichiren Daishonin as saying, “I entrust you with the propagation of Buddhism in your province” (*The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, p. 1117). President Ikeda goes on to say, “In light of these words, we each have a unique and noble mission that has been entrusted to us by the Daishonin to ensure the widespread propagation of the Mystic Law in our respective communities and regions” (May 11 *World Tribune*, p. 11).

He further states, “I hope that each one of you will have the awareness, pride and sense of responsibility of being a leader of our global kosen-rufu movement, and become a transmission point for the spread of Buddhism in society.”

Our family youth festivals are the launching pad for the hopes and dreams of a new generation of youth. Through months of earnest preparation—chanting together, working together, dreaming together—new friendships will be forged. Conviction will be solidified. And from this new generation, new leaders will emerge.

Our purpose in appointing young women's and young men's leaders in every SGI-USA district is to boldly entrust these young people with the responsibility for the success of our movement. While their fresh optimism and vital idealism will strengthen our organization, bequeathing them with this responsibility allows them to put faith into action. As we continue to appoint these youthful leaders in the districts throughout the summer and fall, I would like to highlight their names and the names of their districts in

Seize the Day, our bimonthly youth section of the *World Tribune*.

Our seven youth conferences at the FNCC for this year, starting in July, will gather young people from all over the United States, providing a venue for deep encouragement, the sharing of values and the strengthening of friendships based on shared commitment. Let's completely fill these conferences with youth, ensuring that no one misses this wonderful opportunity.

As you have probably heard, another important feature of our family youth festivals is the singing of Beethoven's "Ode to Joy," a song that expresses humanity's inherent dignity and freedom. Ten years ago, the Nichiren Shoshu priesthood was angered by SGI members singing the song, which they erroneously claimed slandered the Daishonin's Buddhism. They unilaterally excommunicated our mentor, President Ikeda, and the entire SGI membership of 12 million people. This authoritarian move was clearly designed to intimidate our membership into joining Nichiren Shoshu and abandoning the Soka Gakkai. But our resolve proved unshakeable.

The singing of "Ode to Joy" in America this summer is, in one sense, a celebration of our 10 year emancipation from a corrupt clergy that has distorted a fundamental tenet of the Daishonin's Buddhism: All human beings equally possess the potential for enlightenment.

Through the tireless efforts of President Ikeda, our beloved pioneer members and our seniors in the men's and women's divisions, SGI-USA was built. Now, lit by the warmth of their gaze, we initiate *our* struggle, resolved to become outstanding young people, taking full responsibility for our organization and welcoming our mentor back to the United States.