

**MIDWEST YOUTH GATHER IN ST. LOUIS
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Under the warm and sunny skies of the Midwest, more than 130 SGI-USA youth traveled from the states of Minnesota, Illinois, Wisconsin, Nebraska, Iowa, Kansas and Missouri to celebrate their annual youth conference at the Millennium Student Center, University of Missouri-St. Louis. As members and guests entered the center, they were warmly welcomed by men's and women's division members and viewed panels from the Gandhi, King, Ikeda exhibition and selected posters of the SGI-USA's Victory Over Violence program.

The conference theme, "Soka Youth: Changing Our Lives Changes Our World" was the first Midwest Region Youth Conference of the 21st century. Haruko Nakamura, a conference coordinator, stated that "we wanted to focus on the young members' personal growth in the 21st century."

Following opening remarks, participants were involved in team building exercises that involved members getting to know youth from other areas. Throughout the two day event, each area shared experiences, presentations, skits, performances and their unique talent.

The Wichita, Kan., youth acted out a timeline of Nichiren Daishonin's persecutions and the Minnesota youth performed a dance illustrating the mentor and disciple relationship. Hour-long small group discussion sessions focused on the involvement of youth in their districts with suggestions on how to encourage themselves to attend and be a real part of the meetings.

On the second day, Howard Dunlavy, Midwest Region men's leader, encouraged the youth to "return back to our respective areas and do our best to visit our fellow members and support the upcoming family festivals." He also asked the youth to help create the "happiest region in the SGI-USA."