

**SPECIAL YOUTH
PULLOUT SECTION**

SEIZE the Day



Student Division Conference 2001



Deepen Your Network of Trust

SGI President Ikeda's Message to the Student Division Conference

My sincerest congratulations on the holding of your SGI-USA Student Division Conference! All of you are gifted youth upon whose shoulders rest the responsibility for global kosen-rufu. Your development and growth are truly reassuring and make me proud.

The eternal mission of the SGI student division is to advance as the vanguard of kosen-rufu with new thinking and fresh action. How great is your mission as leaders and pioneers of the new century, of a new era for America, to always stand by and protect the people! While you are young, please cultivate abundant intellect and passion. With faith as your foundation, please

pray for the happiness of your friends and discuss with them profound philosophy, thereby expanding and deepening your network of trust and mutual understanding.

Regarding the Lotus Sutra, Nichiren Daishonin wrote, "It is like the lion king, the monarch of all the creatures that run on the ground" (*The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, p. 929). A lion has a heart of invincible courage. I hope that each of you, members of the student division, without a single exception, will be a lion king, a matchless hero who commands the respect of all! Challenge yourselves in all aspects of life and surmount with confidence whatever lies before you, thus creating a history of your own, a record of great triumphs!

Every day I pray earnestly that my beloved student division members live gallantly as standard-bearers of America's new century. ●



Being the Change I Wish to See

**Pamela Mishler,
Berkeley, Calif.**

I was able to attend this year's Student Division Conference at the Florida Nature Culture Center for the first time, held the weekend of Aug. 2-5.

Before I left for the conference, I felt like I was facing a wall, because no matter how much I chanted or how hard I worked, I didn't feel like I was moving forward. I also felt confused about what my mission would be. This all changed when I went to the conference and met hundreds of bright and determined students from all over the country. We had more than 200 people attending the conference, which was the most ever! The theme was, "Be the Change You Wish to See."

On the first night, we were told that we would change our lives in these three days as the foundation for the next 30 years. I'm sure most of the students were skeptical at first, but we would soon learn that this was true. We were also told that we are propagating Buddhism through changing our lives. This conference would challenge our weaknesses and train us to become future leaders.

As an icebreaker, each of us partnered up with the person sitting next to us and shared three goals with each other. My goals were to: 1) get a clear insight on what my mission is, 2) break through the wall I have been trapped behind and 3) develop ever-lasting friendship.

On the second day, Northern California Zone members put on a session titled "Be the Change You Wish to See." We performed a skit that showed how a person could do human revolution by doing small things each day, such as studying five more minutes or chanting 10 more minutes. We broke up into discussion groups and got to know each other better by sharing our goals and discussing what kind of changes we would like to make. It was interesting for me to see how other members are struggling over similar things. We ended the session by writing a letter to ourselves and putting it into a time capsule, promising to meet again in 30 years.

Members from Northeastern Zone presented the Soka Spirit session. We learned more about Soka Spirit and discussed what causes negative characteristics in people. In my group, we discussed how negative characteristics may be caused by chanting with an incorrect spirit. The solution would be to not point fingers at people, but to chant to find wisdom and to gain conviction.

The highlight of the day was when SGI-USA General Director Danny Nagashima lectured on "Prayer, Shakubuku and the Mentor-Disciple Relationship." He was extremely funny and kept everyone in the room laughing! He said that it is not a coincidence that we are here together today and that we should develop our dreams for the rest of the world. He said that we need to have a big dream, not a cheap one. It is important for us to create our dreams and challenge ourselves to the limit.

It was especially touching to hear his experiences as a college student. When he was 22 years old, he chanted 12 hours straight to find his mission. He pointed out to us that President Ikeda says that only humans pray. It is important for us to fuse with

the Gohonzon when we chant—to become one with the Gohonzon. He said then we are able to uncover our natural identity when we chant. We gain wisdom and courage when we don't give up. We were all encouraged and in high spirits after hearing him speak. Later, SGI-USA Women's Leader Matilda Buck made a surprise visit that night and encouraged us as well.

Southern California Zone members held a high-energy session on "Shakubuku and Unity." SGI-USA Youth Leader James Herrmann, spoke about shakubuku. He said that we should share this Buddhism with confidence and in a natural way that touches another person's heart.

The talent show that night was unbelievable! It brought everyone together and opened up our hearts. I had the opportunity to sing the song I was preparing for the upcoming San Francisco Family Youth Festival on Aug. 19. Because of everyone's support, I was able to put my all into the performance. I felt like I was in the state of Buddhahood! I overcame my fears and gained confidence in myself.

My experience at the FNCC was truly amazing! I have a hard time explaining it in words, because I am still absorbing everything. I had so many great conversations with youth from all over the country. Before I knew it, I had broken through the wall I was stuck behind and created deep friendships. Although I still don't know what my mission is, I have confidence that I will be able to overcome whatever struggles I may be faced with. I am looking forward to seeing everyone again in 30 years! Until then, let's chant abundant daimoku and become confident and courageous people who will fight to the end, no matter what situation we may find ourselves in.



It's Up to Us! Preparing for a Century of Peace



(L to R) Bobby Hoadley, Paul Aube, Tim Moore and DJ Gains
The Creativity Session
Tim Moore, Seattle

the end. We gave a good presentation full of quotations, opinions and humor, which really opened up the crowd. We even got to do the skit, which really got the crowd going.

In the end, we succeeded in opening the conference with a bang. The rest of the activities at the FNCC would benefit from the echo of our first performance. Through the performance, the members from the Seattle and Tacoma areas grew closer and matured. Some of us even chanted outside for two hours straight, with no sleep at all the night before.

The talent show was another hectic event. Once again, time was short, so we had to eliminate the extra things we were going to insert between acts. Although the talent show ran about 45 minutes over time and I missed dinner, the show made up for it. The talents were incredible, varying from playing the ukulele to reciting a poem. At the end, I was amazed at the talent that lay hidden within us.

Everybody enjoyed the talent show and it was a great success. It was a harder experience than any of us could have imagined, but that's how all things should be. It builds character. We became stronger members. I think we became better people, ready for the challenges that the 21st century would present to us. (Note to the future: Bring it on!)

All of us from Seattle were painfully optimistic before our trip to Florida. And why wouldn't we be? We had it all figured out. Our creativity session? Done. The skit? Golden. Discussion quotes already picked and the ice-breaker game couldn't lose. (We expected) the people there would love us and everything would just come to us.

But when we arrived at the Florida Nature and Culture Center, the optimism faded into desperation. Two hours before our presentation, things started to fall apart. Some of us weren't ready for the skit, we had no room for the ice-breaker and we even had to cut out our golden skit because time was short. But we couldn't give up. We wouldn't give up. We had to make this session a success. We decided that we had to fight and succeed in



Jenny Houng (far right) with friends.

The Leadership/Mentor-Disciple Relationship Session

Jenny Houng, New Jersey

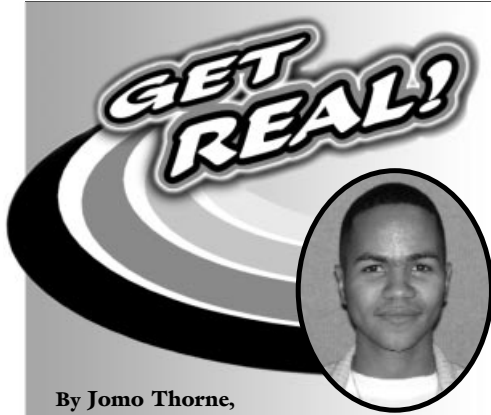
Northwestern Zone members put on a presentation about the mentor-disciple relationship. It was fairly hard for us, as teenagers, to understand this concept. When most of us finally got a basic idea of how important it is to have a mentor, we put together our presentation: "The Mentor is the

Heart, the Disciple is the Action."

We started with scenes from *Star Wars* and *The Matrix*. This helped us convey our point that President Ikeda is dedicating his life to raising capable youth. He believes us to be the leaders of the 21st century. Thanks to him, we were able to challenge our lives at the Florida Nature and Culture Center.

This skit ended with a film of President Toda and President Ikeda's relationship. It showed how the disciple succeeds the mentor.

Through this presentation, I learned that the disciple should not ask the mentor what she should do, but that the disciple should show what she can do by putting the mentor's teachings into action.



By Jomo Thorne,
SGI-USA High School Leader

It's Up To Us!—Preparing For A Culture Of Peace

“Life is chaos, a tangled and confused jungle in which man is lost. But his mind reacts against the sensation of bewilderment: he labors to find ‘roads,’ ‘ways’ through the woods, in the form of clear, firm ideas concerning the universe, positive convictions about the nature of things. The ensemble, or system, of these ideas, is culture in the true sense of the term; it is precisely the opposite of external ornament. Culture is what saves human life from being a mere disaster; it is

what enables man to live a life which is something above meaningless tragedy or inward disgrace” (*Mission of the University*, José Ortega y Gasset, quoted by SGI President Ikeda in *Proposals For The 21st Century*, pp. 32–33).

This summer, representative members of the junior high and high school divisions gathered in Florida to celebrate the fifth conference at the Florida Nature and Culture Center. The theme of this year’s conference was “It’s Up To Us: Preparing For A Culture Of Peace.” Today’s SGI teens will lead our youth division for the next 20 years. They have already become the engines of the more than 40 SGI-USA Family Youth Festivals taking place nationwide this year. As they continue to live out their lives, today’s teens will literally create the history of the 21st century. By the end of this second cycle of seven bells, they will be the same age President Ikeda is today.

In thinking about the mission of today’s teens and the theme of our FNCC conference, I wondered about the future of the wonderful junior high and high school members that are so active today. What kind of kosen-rufu movement will they lead? How will their actions lead to the development of a culture of peace in the world? And just how will they go about doing this?

In the book *Proposals For The 21st Century*, President Ikeda says, “Culture is ‘the system of ideas concerning the world and humanity (or human existence)’ which is applied by one’s inner self to guide him in living this real life”(p.

32). It seems to me like President Ikeda is saying that a culture of peace is really the system (and the application of) beliefs that guide people to create value. In other words, as today’s teens develop their character and create internal harmony, they will exert an incredible influence on society.

So where do today’s teens start?

We can start by exerting ourselves to do joyful and natural shakubuku. Everything we enjoy in the SGI today—the size and diversity of our membership, our great community centers and other facilities—has been made possible through the efforts of previous generations of SGI members. If we are to take our kosen-rufu movement to a new level, we need to take responsibility for doing shakubuku. We should seize the opportunities presented by this year’s activities to share Buddhism with our friends and family.

We can also make a strong determination to become self-mastering individuals. This means learning all about our basic tendencies and determining that we will recognize and change our negative tendencies the moment they manifest themselves.

Trees prepare themselves to bud and flourish during winter, but their efforts aren’t apparent until the spring. We need to be confident that all the causes we make through our Buddhist practice are profound, even if they seem subtle. We can create a culture of peace by the little things we do everyday that enhance our lives and the lives of those around us. ●

This Practice Makes Me Grow

Jackie Mills, St. Louis

I have never been able to stand up to my father, especially when he was wrong. Before I left for the Florida Nature and Culture Center, he told my mom that he wouldn’t support my brother and me if we decided to go to Soka University. My parents were in the midst of a divorce, so I had many obstacles in my life.

My mom, brother and I drove to the FNCC—22 hours! The first eight hours I cried. I felt terrible. I couldn’t handle it anymore.

On the third evening at the FNCC, I was chanting and thinking about something I could do to challenge myself on my last night. I thought about my dad and the divorce. I thought about Soka University.

And then I cried. Not because I was sad, but because I felt more powerful than ever. I recalled someone saying that no matter what happens, everything will be OK because I practice Buddhism. I was finally happy for my parents getting a divorce. They would be happy, for once. It would be great. I decided that I would tell my father this. I also wanted to ask if he would support me—even the tiniest bit—in going to Soka University.

I cried all through gongyo. I felt great and powerful. After gongyo, I sprinted to my room. I called my dad and told him I was OK and happy for the divorce. Then I asked him, “Will you support me if I go to SUA?” He said not financially, but otherwise he said he would. It’s taken me my whole life to say something like that to my dad. I had the courage to confront my father and showed him actual proof that this practice makes me grow. ●

A Letter to My Friends

Astrid J. Lugo, Puerto Rico

It was a very special experience being at the Junior High and High School Division Conference at the Florida Nature and Culture Center. It was wonderful to see so many people my age working for the same cause and practicing Buddhism. Many capable leaders encouraged us and became our true friends. I feel I grew a lot and that I took the seed they planted in my heart to encourage others in becoming truly happy. And I had so much fun! I could have lived there for all eternity. The place is just beautiful!

To those who have not yet gone to the FNCC, please—I’m telling you—make the determination to go! I struggled getting the money for the trip, but I just had to do it... and did it! It really wasn’t easy since my mom is a single parent and there are three children in my family, but with determination and a lot of daimoku, nothing is impossible!

With gratitude,

Astrid