

## March 16 Celebration Closes the Generation Gap

By CHARLISE LYLES

Columbus, Ohio, March 16

Three generations of disciples gathered today to renew their pledge to work for the peace and happiness of humanity in the 21st century.

About 130 Ohio Territory youth were among thousands who assembled across the country to commemorate Kosen-rufu Day, that chilly morning of March 16, 1958, when 6,000 youth gathered at the head temple to inherit the torch of kosen-rufu from the second Soka Gakkai president, Josei Toda.

From a historical slide show recounting that event to inspiring experiences, dialogues on mission and the mentor-and-disciple relationship, Music Corps performances, line dancing and pizza, it was a fun- and faith-filled “Dress Rehearsal For The 21st Century.”

General Director Zaitzu urged the youth not to fret over problems like having no money. “To be young itself is the greatest asset,” he said.

“The four years leading up to 2001 is the period that we entrust the responsibility of kosen-rufu to the youth division,” he said. “So this is a very important time for you to receive training to become great leaders for the 21st century. No matter what obstacles you encounter, challenge to overcome them one by one. SGI President Ikeda is really praying for the SGI-USA youth division’s continuous growth.”

Next, Chicago Joint Territory Vice Young Men’s Division Chief Osamu Kaneko shared his determination. Some faces filled with sorrow as he relayed the death of SGI-USA member Curtis Caldwell, just two days before the meeting. Last January, Mr. Caldwell, of Cleveland, had graduated to the men’s division after fighting 10 years in the youth division.

“His death could mean so many things,” said Mr. Kaneko, his voice breaking at times. “However, from my deep grief I take this incident as a time to double my efforts for kosen-rufu with our common mentor, President Ikeda, whom Curtis always respected and loved.”

Then Mr. Kaneko read his freshly composed poem “A Pledge of My Eternal Battle for Kosen-rufu,” which clearly echoed “A Blue Deeper Than the Blue of the Indigo Plant Itself,” President Ikeda’s March 16 commemorative poem.

*Oh, March 16th,*

*It is time for youth to make a diamond-like, firm resolution*

*It is time for youth to begin praying with burning passion*

*And it is the time for youth to, resolutely and finally, start taking action for you and others.*

Lyntoya Franklin, 16, followed by sharing her ongoing fight against a congenital heart defect that has caused kidney and lung failure (see “Experience,” Sept. 20, 1996, *World Tribune*). The Cleveland youth expressed appreciation to the many members who kept a chanting vigil for her and for the warm encouragement she received from SGI Vice Women’s Division Chief Yumiko Hachiya during President Ikeda’s visit last June.

Jason Sieminski, 17, of Toledo, Ohio, then shared that the turning point in his faith came last fall when his mother’s lungs collapsed. Despite a bleak prognosis, he stayed by her side as she lay unconscious. “Your mission is not over,” he whispered in her ear.

“My mom is back home now, has gained over 30 pounds and is doing really good,” Jason said. “I’ve learned that through sincere daimoku, anything is possible. I’m so fortunate to have had so much support from everyone.”

In the spirit of mentor and disciple, Lyntoya and Jason both vowed to deepen their faith and to share Nichiren Daishonin’s Buddhism wherever they go.

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Title: March 16 Celebration Closes Generation Gap

Subject: World Tribune 04/04/97 n.3133 p.1 WT970404p01 Columbus, Ohio 03/16/97

Author: Charles Lyles

Keywords: 03/16/97 Celebration Closes Columbus Events Exchanges Generation History Kosen-rufu March Meetings National News Ohio