

Make New Friends, But Treasure Old Ones

By ED FEASEL

SGI-USA Youth Division Chief

More than 600 young people from around the country gathered to discuss faith and life at the Florida Nature and Culture Center this summer in four conferences — one each for the young men's division, young women's division, junior high and high school divisions, and Music Corps and Fife and Drum Corps. From what I witnessed and what I heard, the ideas and passions generated at these conferences are sure to ripple throughout the organization in the months to come.

I want to thank all those people who worked behind the scenes to make these meetings successful. Thanks, too, to all the participants for traveling so far and to the parents who made it possible for their children to attend. I wish everyone luck as you strive to live up to the determinations — and strengthen the friendships — you made in Florida.

I've been doing some thinking about friendship lately and how the organization's goals toward the end of the year deal with making and keeping friends. In June, the Central Executive Committee devised an "action plan" that focuses on increasing readership of the publications, completing the geographic reorganization, doing propagation and studying the essence of the temple issue.

As I was thinking about these goals, I remembered a motto SGI President Ikeda once shared from Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the founder and first president of the Republic of Turkey: "Make new friends, but treasure old ones." President Ikeda suggested that we make this a motto of the SGI.

In the past I have tended to focus on only one part of this phrase at a time. There have been times when I may have focused on making new friends, or introducing others to Buddhism, but may not have paid as much attention to improving our organization or caring for members. At other times, I've been so focused on taking care of members that I've put propagation on the backburner.

I strongly feel that, through this motto, President Ikeda is urging us to do both. And I think the four goals of the action plan do just that.

Sharing this Buddhism with others equates to making new friends. Increasing readership of the publications, completing the geographic reorganization and helping our members understand the temple issue correspond to treasuring old friends.

I've been inspired recently by James Herrmann, the YMD chief, and Reiko Groshell, the YWD chief. Working with them over the past months, I have seen the tremendous efforts they put forth in treasuring old friends.

But they also make efforts to introduce others to this Buddhism. Reiko has just introduced a young woman to the SGI, and she will be receiving the Gohonzon very soon. James chants every day to share this Buddhism with others; he told me how he introduced a clerk at a rental car company, and how this young man now attends meetings and has begun chanting.

As youth, let's follow the examples of our YWD and YMD leaders and put our energy into living up to the motto of "Make new friends, but treasure old ones." Refreshed by our summer activities, let's focus on accomplishing our goals in the last four months of 1997. After all, it is our actions today that will determine what the beginning of the new century will look like.

Again, thank you for all your efforts so far this year, and congratulations on the great success of all our summer activities.

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Title: Make New Friends, But Treasure Old Ones

Subject: World Tribune 09/05/97 n.3155 p.10 WT970905p10

Author: Ed Feasel

Keywords: Divisional Friends Friendship Goals Guidance Make News Ones Organization Pages Treasure Youth