

## FORGING A SOLID ALLIANCE OF SHARED PURPOSE

This recent Young Men's Division Conference at the Florida Nature and Culture Center (FNCC), June 8–11, was truly an amazing experience. The theme of the conference was “Forging a Solid Alliance of Shared Purpose”, and its goal was for each of the participants to come away with a feeling of camaraderie and sense of responsibility for kosen-rufu.

But honestly, many of the guys who attended the conference did not feel any responsibility towards kosen-rufu, and they didn't feel any connection to SGI President Ikeda. In fact, some didn't even do gongyo unless we kept encouraging them to join us. That's what made the conference interesting. Each of us was seeking something whether we knew it or not. Every person went there seeking something inside, uncertain as to what it was, but found something new in our lives when we left.

Before the conference even began, guys were struggling just to get to the FNCC. There were so many experiences from people who struggled to get the money, the time off from work or any other thing to prevent them from going.

One experience that was truly inspiring concerned a young man who had decided to go to the conference two weeks before it was supposed to start. At first he thought he could go, no problem. But when he sat down and thought about it, he realized he had no money at all!! Actually he had minus \$17.

This young man was determined to go to this conference to develop his faith and to awaken the mentor–disciple relationship in his life. He pulled together every dollar he had left and cut back drastically on his expenses.

Eventually he was able to save the money, bought a ticket and signed up immediately. He realized that he had to challenge himself and follow his heart. This experience was repeated over and over again by many other participants, who struggled to the last minute to get to this conference.

Cory Taylor, the SGI-USA Young Men's Division Leader, began the conference by talking about the three levels of friendship President Ikeda has spoken about. The first level is the type of friendship where two people enjoy each other's company. The second level is enjoyment of each other, but working to support each other. And the third level is where there is enjoyment and support, but there is also the shared purpose that is so deep and strong that the people involved are willing to die for it and for each other.

I feel that we all worked to develop this third level of friendship at the conference. We became comrades in faith and life.

Other topics of the conference included: “Forging a Solid Alliance of Shared Purpose”, presented by the Young Men's Division of the Southern California Zone, “Taking Full Responsibility for Kosen-rufu” presented by the Northeastern Zone Young Men's Division, and “Soka Spirit” presented by the Northwestern Zone Young Men's Division.

Each topic was a powerful and moving experience, where all the conference participants were able to open up and share their feelings, questions and determinations through meaningful dialogue. The spirit of the conference was

incredible and the presentations were strong. By the end of the conference, we had all taking a step forward in our faith and in our daily lives.

Also, people found family members they had not seen in years and were certain they would never find. There were guys over 35 hanging out with teenagers like they were best friends. There were musical performances that knocked the roof off during the talent show. The creative abilities of these young men were incredible. The annual Young Men's Division Basketball tournament, which was won by the team from Oakland, Calif. also created a relaxing and bonding effect.

To truly understand the desire that these guys had to participate in this conference could be seen and heard in the faces and voices of those who arrived after the conference began. They kept arriving, from very early Friday morning and continued into early Saturday morning.

It meant so much to each participant that there was a shared desire to seek out the mentor and disciple relationship and to overcome the many personal obstacles. Their many struggles led to so many friendships, friendships that will lead the movement of kosen-rufu in the 21st century.