

**IMPRESSIONS FROM THE YOUTH PERFORMANCE GROUPS  
CONFERENCE  
JOHN “AMANTE” PEGUESE, SAN FRANCISCO**

On my way to the FNCC, I was dealing with my low life-condition, but during the flight, I began to change because I realized the major cause that I was making by attending this conference. I looked at the powerful youth members that were with me and thought about all the fellow youth I would be meeting from around the country and the fact that we would be united.

Upon my arrival, I met so many great people that encouraged me. I thought of how significant it was that youth were gathering from across the nation to discover and create causes toward our missions in the kosen-rufu movement through the art of performing.

I was so happy that we were able to fulfill SGI President Ikeda’s desire to “value friendship.” We not only valued our existing friendships, but also established new ones.

The unity of all the groups reminded me of my inner-potential to develop as a strong individual. Through the conference, I made the determination to support the San Francisco Red Phoenix Drama Group so that we can become stronger in faith and make consistent efforts to develop a personal connection with President Ikeda.

I would also like to offer my deep appreciation to all the supporters and participants of the Youth Performance Groups Conference who made it such a success. Thank you all very much!

**Martin “Free” Ramos, Los Angeles**

I finally understand what everyone says about the FNCC experience. It is truly life-changing. I will forever treasure the bonds of friendship I developed there, knowing that we are all brothers and sisters in faith who will see one another at next year’s conference and every conference after that! Thank you to everyone who attended for sharing your lives with me and allowing me to share mine with you!

I love you all!

**Shante Berrios, Las Vegas**

Upon arrival at the Florida Nature and Culture Center, I must admit I was pretty negative. I had been through so many obstacles to get there, and they had taken a toll on me. My Buddhist practice was not strong, but I was fighting hard within my dance group. I didn’t realize that without a strong Buddhist practice (no matter how many activities I did), I would not truly become happy.

During the conference, I made many lifelong friends. I saw people from all over display their great talents. Their fighting spirit inspired me so much. Through their inspiration, my own fighting spirit returned and I was able to battle a knee injury and participate in everything. Through this conference, I realized the importance of having friends who practice this Buddhism.

Throughout the weekend, the lecture and dialogue about the mentor–disciple relationship showed me how fortunate I am to have my mom and grandmother practice and, most of all, to have SGI President Ikeda. I now realize how much he cares about all of us. He dedicated the FNCC to everyone so that we can refresh our

practice and build great friendships. His spirit is what will continue to propel me to work for kosen-rufu forever.

### **Reisha Bogan, Chicago**

This was my first time attending a conference at the FNCC. I can truly say that I had the best time of my life. The emotions I feel from the friendships I made are overwhelming. The bonds that were created with both the leaders and members I met from all over the United States will last forever.

I now have a stronger determination to stand up in Chicago to increase the participation of youth in the “Era of Humanity” dance group and also to encourage and support them in attending the next Youth Performance Groups Conference.

I left the FNCC with a better understanding of Buddhism and why I practice. I also have a greater desire to study. I will treasure this experience forever.

### **Traci Wilson, San Francisco**

Now is the time to greatly expand your state of life and begin your real struggle for kosen-rufu. Please challenge every difficulty earnestly and try to embrace everyone around you warmly. Laugh off any unpleasantness you encounter and forge ahead boldly” (*The Human Revolution*, vol. 2, p. 38).

I truly believe that nothing but daimoku and my faith in the Mystic Law could have prepared me for this wonderful journey. I had no idea what to expect. All I envisioned was a warm tropical setting with every amenity I would ever need for the four days at my disposal (including air-conditioning and a swimming pool). What else would a girl need?

Well, this girl realized during four heavenly days with youth from all across the country how very important it is just to be “present” and listen to somebody, or just know when someone needed a hug or a smile. I remember my friend telling me that when you get to the FNCC President Ikeda’s spirit is so present that you can feel it.

The first evening, I remembered being excited and could barely wait to do gongyo. During gongyo, I was so focused on the Gohonzon and its beautiful home that I felt tears well up inside of me, blurring my vision. I knew at that moment that I had felt what was in President Ikeda’s heart. This meant to me that all my dreams and goals I set for myself in preparation for this conference were attainable through my sincere efforts at this conference and the friendships I made would be everlasting.

The imagery of all the bright, smiling, crying, joyful, determined faces will stay with me. I am forever indebted to all the youth and leaders who attended this conference and I will never forget the staff and volunteers that cleaned up after us all. Peace and blessings!