

GET REAL!
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THOUGHTS ON THE JHS/HS CONFERENCE 2000

Yes, I understand that when everyone talks about the Florida Nature and Culture Center and shares their experiences, they all say almost the same thing: that it is a life-transforming experience and that, of course, the food is good. Well, you know what, this was my second time attending this conference and I wanted to say it was a completely life-transforming experience and the food was great! This time I was able to work behind the scenes and I have a new understanding and admiration for those who participate in making these conferences great, especially the staff at the FNCC for their tireless efforts to make the conferences special for each member.

I was so amazed by how much each person went through to either get to the FNCC and/or to just stay there. The majority of the members who attended our conference were under the age of 18. Despite their young ages, they had persevered through financial, health, school and family problems. When hearing impressions on the last day, I could feel a sense of victory that they had overcome what had plagued them before they came to the conference. I also felt the warmth and love of everlasting friendship.

SGI President Ikeda has said: “ In a way, we could say that your problems represent the problems of all humanity. In that respect, your victory will open the way to victory for the youth of the entire world. It will also illuminate the path along which humanity must advance in the 21st century. You are the hope of America and the world!” (*World Tribune*, Feb. 25, p. 4)

This passage contains the theme of our conference and represents the bulk of what the conference stood for: to listen and learn from one another’s struggles and to create victories from those struggles; to realize and take responsibility for the mission of making a difference, not only in our own areas, but for humanity and the world.

I wanted to take time to share excerpts from an essay written by 17-year-old Victoria Kraus of Los Angeles. She was responding to the essay question, “Why do you want to attend this conference and what do you think of the theme ‘We Are the Hope of the World?’” Victoria writes: “Every generation of youth has had some kind of impact on the next generation, and now it is our turn to impact society in a positive manner. We should take advantage of that time and make every moment count. Youth really are the hope of the world, because it’s what we do that will pave the way for other generations. I think it’d be a good idea if we as youth kept a positive vibe on life and everything else, just so that history will not repeat itself. If people want changes it has to start from within each and every individual.”

Again, I want to thank everyone who made this event possible and, oops, I forgot to thank specifically the volunteer chefs that made us all full and happy.