

STUDENT DIVISION CONFERENCE 2000 BECOME COURAGEOUS LEADERS OF THE NEW CENTURY

During the weekend of Aug. 17–20, more than 175 determined students gathered at the Florida Nature and Culture Center to prepare for their missions for peace in the 21st century. Also in attendance to support this conference were several SGI-USA leaders: General Director Danny Nagashima, student division leaders Wendy DeSouza and Daisaku Leslie, Vice Student Division Leader Boston Snowden, Youth Division Senior Advisor Ed Feasel, Youth Division Leader James Herrmann and Young Women's Division Leader Renu Jiandani. The conference proved to be a very powerful experience for everyone involved, symbolizing the emergence of bodhi-sattvas from around the nation.

Conference participants arrived in Florida from their respective areas on Thursday afternoon. Even though most people had traveled great distances to attend, only ebullient smiles could be seen on the faces of even the most tired individuals. On Thursday evening the group convened for its first gongyo in the Friendship Auditorium, chanting with tremendous energy and unity.

On Friday, four seminar sessions were held, focusing on the mentor–disciple relationship, student life and Soka Spirit. In the first session, Danny Nagashima gave a heartfelt and moving talk on mentor–disciple, sharing a touching account of how his relationship with SGI President Ikeda helped him to develop into a capable person.

General Director Nagashima also focused on debunking a common misperception of the mentor as a boss. He emphasized that the mentor–disciple relationship should be based upon a shared vision, with the mentor selflessly dedicating himself for people and challenging the disciple to take responsibility and action toward the goal of kosen rufu. The multitude of profound insights that came out of this session paved the way for a conference filled with realizations.

The student life session featured many experiences by students about difficulties they faced in their daily lives. Strengthening faith, roommate obstacles and issues with self-perception were some of the topics in this session. This session was quite encouraging, as each student's experience culminated in a major life victory. Students left this session determined to be courageous lions, working toward their dreams undaunted by fears and obstacles.

The two Soka Spirit sessions held on Friday afternoon and evening focused on a wide array of topics like kosen-rufu, fundamental darkness and the temple issue. The first session began with a video asking students what they thought Soka Spirit means. The answers varied greatly, ranging from “Standing up for justice” to “Accomplishing my dreams” to “The mentor–disciple relationship.” The bold, strong and broad hearts of the student division members was evidenced by these responses.

Experiences shared during the Soka Spirit sessions were incredible, illustrating the courage and seeking spirit of many students who have experienced obstacles. Terrific skits focusing on the three obstacles and four devils and fundamental darkness helped to strengthen everyone's understanding of Buddhist principles. The creativity implemented in the Soka Spirit presentations was amazing; one very memorable skit

even mimicked the television show *The View*!

On Saturday, after a discussion of Soka University of America, Aliso Viejo with Ed Feasel, a campus clubs and shakubuku (propagation of Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism) session was held. Students from various parts of the country shared their valiant experiences of accomplishing shakubuku through their own human revolution and actions. Others discussed the steps to start a campus club and the difficulties associated with such actions. This session was very provoking, inspiring thoughts of a new era of propa-gation in America based upon faith cour-age and personal development.

The rest of Saturday was filled with opportunities for individuals to relax and get to know one another. Enjoyable sightseeing tours to the Everglades, South Beach and the Sawgrass Mills Mall took place. The evening concluded with a talent show that continued until early the next morning. The talent, artistry and thoughtfulness shared by those who gave performances were amazing. After the talent show, many students stayed up all night chanting until sunrise.

The 2000 Student Division Conference was a truly significant occasion. All of the youth present showed their dedication to a new era of peace based upon friendship and respect. With strong faith in the Gohonzon, many left the FNCC sensing their mission to seek out President Ikeda's heart with an open mind and a courageous heart, and to advance the kosen-rufu movement through propagation.