

## YOUTH FOCUS ON PROPAGATION IN 2001 NEW YEAR'S MESSAGE FROM SGI-USA YOUTH DIVISION LEADERS

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**Steve Mortan**, SGI-USA Young Men's Division Leader

**James Herrmann: Happy New Year!** First, I want to thank all of the youth of SGI-USA for your amazing support and effort in advancing kosen-rufu in the United States in 2000—we advanced by leaps and bounds, achieving many victories. Together with Renu Jiandani and Cory Taylor leading the young men's and young women's divisions, each of you have indeed created an unprecedented history. I thank both Cory and Renu for their exemplary leadership. Without them, our progress would not have been possible.

Succeeding them as young women's division and young men's division leaders are Wendy DeSouza's and Steve Mortan—bright, courageous and inspirational leaders who will usher in a new era of development in the new century. Both in their 20s, Wendy and Steve's appointments itself signifies a new departure for SGI-USA. I look forward to working together with both of them. Wendy and Steve share their thoughts later in this article regarding the upcoming activities for the SGI-USA youth. Please consider the contents of their article as the general direction for the youth in 2001.

Looking ahead, I want to share what this year's theme—"Year of Total Victory for The New Century"—means to me and what I feel our united focus as youth will be in this year.

As I prayed and pondered the significance of this theme, I recalled SGI President Ikeda's guidance: "March 16, Kosen-rufu Day. The spirit of this day lives not in magnificent ceremonies or high-sounding words. It lives in victory. Victory is the most crucial thing in all endeavors. In life and in kosen-rufu, we either win or lose. I would like you to be absolute victors in both. No matter what excuses we try to make, giving in to defeat brings misery and loses us the respect of others. I hope each of you without exception will adorn your life with indestructible triumph" (*Faith into Action*, p. 73).

To me, showing "total victory" in all areas of my life equals showing measureable results and what I accomplish in my life is up to my determination and the clear goals I set for myself.

Likewise, what we accomplish as youth will be determined by our united focus. I firmly believe our focus in 2001 should be propagation. Let's awaken to our deep sense of mission in propagating this Buddhism in every corner of the United States. I'm confident this is the surest path to "Total Victory for the New Century."

We should begin by setting our own personal shakubuku target. Who will join the SGI this year as a result of our efforts? As we seek the answer to this question, let's pray sincerely and fight wholeheartedly to break through the limitations of our daily life, showing unrefutable actual proof in our daily lives.

## PROPAGATION

**Wendy DeSouza:** Let's focus on propagation in 2001. Our generation—the “20-somethings”—has the opportunity to implement new ideas. We've been waiting for this time. Many youth are working so hard to share Buddhism with others because they feel a debt of gratitude to President Ikeda.

**Steve Mortan:** The best way to reply to our mentor is through propagating this Buddhism.

Student Division Leader Daisaku Leslie shared with me an encounter he had with President Ikeda last year. During a dinner meeting in Japan, Daisaku asked President Ikeda how to encourage students who were suffering from mental illness, depression and other serious problems. President Ikeda went right to the heart of the matter, explaining that the only way to help youth change their situation is through encouraging them to do shakubuku.

**Wendy:** To care enough for others to introduce them to the SGI will be our generation's challenge.

## MARCH 16 COMMEMORATIVE MEETINGS

**Wendy:** How can we create a natural, joyful propagation movement?

**Steve:** I believe everything comes down to our own determination for March 16, Kosen-rufu Day. Two years ago, the youth in my area of Riverside, Calif., met to discuss goals toward March 16. During our discussion, one of the youth suggested we make a goal of 100 guests. At first I felt like saying, “Are you crazy?” I then thought to myself: “Why not? This Buddhism is about making the impossible possible.” With this spirit, we struggled as if President Ikeda was right next to us — and we met our goal.

I also want to mention that the youth learned a great deal by supporting the February Women's General Meetings. The formula I observed was daimoku, home visits and bringing guests. This created an electrifying environment.

**Wendy:** The youth from the area where I practiced in Chicago last year also made the impossible possible. Our sincere women's division members supported us by bringing many youth to the meeting. Together, each one of us grew tremendously.

We should use the formula you mentioned — abundant daimoku, home visits and inviting guests.

## CARE FOR ONE PERSON

**Steve:** We should take to heart what President Ikeda said last year in September: “If you only attend large meetings, you cannot come to know the participants as individuals... A strong, powerful solidarity can only be built through one-to-one dialogue” (Oct. 13, 2000, *World Tribune*, p. 7).

**Wendy:** Ultimately, our March 16 success will come down to whether or not each one of us can care for another person. Before November 18, I made a personal home visitation goal. I made visiting members a priority over from my other responsibilities, sharing my feeling about President Ikeda and trying to encourage each person in his or her daily life. Sometimes I also brought other people with me. I deepened my understanding of President Ikeda's heart and, as General Director Nagashima put it, how the members are heroes.

**Steve:** As youth, we have to be the ones who go out and convey President Ikeda's heart. Many youth have studied volume 10 of *The Human Revolution*. During the Osaka campaign, young Daisaku Ikeda tirelessly went out to the frontlines and inspired members one-on-one. He trained successors. With that same sense of responsibility, I hope the young men of SGI-USA will make President Ikeda our greatest example of a true leader. I want us to study how President Ikeda fought when he was in his 20s.

**Wendy:** I'm going to awaken my own spirit toward March 16 based on President Ikeda's example in Osaka. Why don't we study volume 10 together? We don't have to have complicated strategies other than the basics of faith, practice and study.

As young women, my hope is that we can deepen our direct relationship with President Ikeda, conduct countless one-to-one dialogues that leave people with a renewed sense of hope, and seriously tackle study of Nichiren Daishonin's writings toward March 16. My dream is for each one of us to become ambassadors of peace and justice by developing an unshakable conviction in faith.

## PLAN FOR 2001

**Steve:** What's our timeline toward the March Commemorative Meetings?

**Wendy:** At the December 2000 Central Executive Conference, youth leaders made a determination to gather 20,000 youth and guests at the March 16 meetings.

**Steve:** January is the month we suggested to hold kick-off meetings in the regions and areas and hold planning meetings for March. Our March 16 meetings will be four-divisional introductory meetings at the district level.

**Wendy:** Youth will spearhead this effort and unite with the men's and women's division members. Let's also empower the next generation of youth leaders in their 20s.

We should keep in mind that our March 16 meetings are not additional meetings. Rather, they provide an opportunity for the youth to sponsor the regularly scheduled district meeting in the month of March.

**Steve:** Throughout the month of February, we will support the Women's General Meetings. Let's do whatever they ask and help them realize a great victory. In addition, let's continue planning and visiting our members.

For the month of March, we will celebrate with joyful introductory meetings in the districts. Centering on the districts, the youth will lead the way.

**Wendy:** Great! I want to add that our movement of propagation should move toward April and May Gohonzon conferrals. Unless our guests learn gongyo, get connected to a district and receive the *World Tribune*, it will be difficult for them to take faith and join. Let's help them get started on the right foot.

## **TOWARD ZONE SGI FAMILY YOUTH FESTIVALS**

**Steve:** The result of March 16 will determine the success of our Zone SGI Family Youth Festivals. That's why it's so important that we start now.

**Wendy:** Our goal is to gather 100,000 members and guests throughout the country. Let's unite with our mentor and sing "Ode to Joy"!

### **TIMELINE:**

**January**—Kick-off meetings, home visitations, daimoku

**February**—Support Women's Division General Meetings

**March**—Hold introductory gatherings at the district level

**April-May**—Support our guests in receiving the Gohonzon and joining the SGI

**June-October**—Zone SGI Family Youth Festivals