

FRIENDSHIP TIES US TOGETHER
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NEWLY APPOINTED SGI-USA MUSIC GROUPS LEADER

Happy New Millennium! How fortunate we are to be alive as we embark on a new journey in the 21st century! Together with SGI President Ikeda, we will ring in the second series of seven bells!

First, I would like to extend my deepest and most sincere gratitude to Emy Mukumoto for the time and energy she put forth developing the SGI-USA Music Groups for the past three years. Her tireless efforts are an inspiration and a foundation for me to learn and grow from.

Growing up in the Fife and Drum Corps, I found one of life's greatest treasures — eternal friendship. My closest friends today are young women I met in the Fife and Drum Corps. President Ikeda states: "Friendship is strong. Friendship, camaraderie and unity in faith are the heart of the SGI. They come even before the organization. We must never make the mistake of thinking that it is the other way around. The organization serves as a means for deepening friendship, comradeship and faith. To confuse the means with the end is a terrible mistake" (*Faith into Action*, p. 221).

Let us always remember that friendship is a vital part of the Music Groups. Through friendship, we can encourage one another and build a bond that is unbreakable. Friendship is the string that ties us together and unites us as disciples of President Ikeda.

Let's unite together, alongside our mentor, President Ikeda, and support the various activities in 2001! Let's support our mothers of kosen-rufu with their women's general meetings in February. Let's be the frontrunners in the March introductory gatherings, inviting all of our friends to participate! Most of all, let's become the art and creativity that makes the Zone Family Youth Festivals a total success! We must take the reins and lead the way in promoting Soka University of America, exhibiting Soka Care and using Soka Spirit in our daily lives. We are the future of this organization and it is most crucial that we begin to take responsibility for the development of SGI-USA.

Through the art of music and dance, let's show the world how capable we are for the 21st century. President Ikeda states, "Culture and art should be shared and enjoyed by all. They do not discriminate. When we encounter beauty, we return to the essence of our humanity, where all people are equal. From that standpoint, there is no distinction between company president and employee. There are no teachers or students, no specialists or amateurs. Such distinctions exist in society, but we need a place where we can restore our humanity. That place is constructed by art, by culture. Creating that place is also one of the fundamental roles of religion" (*Discussions on Youth*, vol. 2, p. 94).

Let's use our instruments, our moves and our spirit to communicate to the world and advance worldwide kosen-rufu. The Music Groups are a place where we are all equal.

I will put forth all of my efforts in order to develop eternal friendships with each of you in the Music Groups. Basing my actions on daimoku and study of the Gosho, I will do my best to unite each of us across America as we turn the pages of history and welcome the new millennium! Let's welcome President Ikeda to America with our hearts radiating joy and total victory in every aspect of our lives!