

**OUR UNIQUENESS BUILDS A HUMANISTIC ORGANIZATION
MESSAGE TO THE FNCC GAY, LESBIAN AND TRANSGENDER
CONFERENCE
FROM SGI-USA YOUTH LEADER JAMES HERRMANN**

Congratulations on this historic conference! I wish I could be there together with all of you. However, this month [March] the youth throughout America are celebrating March 16, Kosen-rufu Day, by taking responsibility for propagation within their districts, so I am unable to attend. I think it's significant that your conference is being held during the same month when the attention of our entire organization is focused on youth, and when the youth are focused entirely on propagation.

When I was a young leader, one young man — a friend of mine who also grew up in the organization — told me he was gay. He couldn't tell anyone else, not even his parents. I felt honored that he would confide in me and I determined to help him accept who he was and realize his mission. Eventually, he shared who he was with his family and friends. But more importantly, he accepted the value of his own life. His path was not easy, but through faith and his SGI-USA youth activities, my friend transformed a life of shame and self-hatred into a life of value-creation.

Across America, lesbian and gay youth are at risk. Many of these youth live in fear of violence from hate crimes and others live in hiding, fearing rejection or even abuse from their families and friends. Depression, addiction and suicide are only the most extreme expressions of the suffering of these young people.

This is why we do *shakubuku*! This is why the youth division exists! SGI-USA must be a haven for all youth in America. Too many people in America are lost in self-hatred. But within the SGI, young people are cherished. Their potential is recognized and their talent is cultivated. This is SGI President Ikeda's expectation for the youth, and it is also our responsibility.

To all the youth in attendance, I hope this conference is not a one-time celebration, but rather a chance to gain ongoing inspiration and confidence in our philosophy and movement. When you return to your districts, let's unite in boldly sharing this Buddhism with our friends throughout the month of March, and continue in greater and greater waves throughout the 21st century. Together, let all of us — of every cultural background and sexual identity — build the most beautiful, humanistic organization in history.

Once again, congratulations! I'll see you all back on the frontlines!