

## THE 50TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE YOUNG MEN'S AND YOUNG WOMEN'S DIVISIONS

STEVE MORTAN  
SGI-USA YOUNG MEN'S LEADER

Congratulations on the 50th anniversary of the young men's division! It is amazing to be celebrating the establishment of the YMD at the beginning of the second set of seven bells and it is a great benefit to be able to fight for kosen-rufu with SGI President Ikeda. A friend of mine pointed out that if we were born 20 years later or 20 years earlier, we would not have the opportunity to be a young man at this important time.

Earlier this year, SGI General Director Eiichi Wada talked extensively about young women. He shared President Ikeda's vision that this is the Century of Women. Mr. Wada did not talk much about young men. I felt frustrated about this and after chanting, I came to the conclusion that this was a clear message that it's time for young men to create a new history.

I began to hold dialogues with young men all over the country and learned how they were seeking to develop their lives. Inspired by these young men, I made a determination to become a disciple in training. I began to look at every aspect of my life and push myself. I went back to the bread and butter of the YMD—the Gajokai and the Soka Group. With a new resolve to live with the true spirit of these training groups, I felt reinvigorated.

When I opened my heart to receiving training, I noticed that my life began to grow. At this point, it became clear that President Ikeda is not only my mentor, but also the greatest example of a YMD member. As I tried to follow his example, many of my shortcomings started to appear. I determined more than ever to develop myself. When I advanced with this spirit, I was able to accomplish more. The mentor-disciple relationship came alive in my life, and it was a joyful experience.

When President Ikeda was in his 20s, he visited 8,000 members in one year, exerting himself to reach out to each person. He was determined to help those who were suffering the most. Inspired by this, I made a determination to visit 500 young men by July 11. I met with 215 young men by that date, but I did not give up. I renewed my determination to keep advancing toward my goal and accomplish it no matter what.

As I met these wonderful young men from all over the country, I prayed with one thought in my mind: what can I do to encourage President Ikeda's sons in America? But actually, it was me who gained something from those 215 young men. Each one taught me something unique and helped me understand and change my own life.

What is the mission of the YMD in the 21st century? What is our expectation for the future? I firmly believe that it is all found in the President Ikeda's latest poem: "O the Joyous Dance of Youth!"

*Nichiren Daishonin tells us:  
"At first only Nichiren  
Chanted Nam-myoho-renge-kyo,  
But then two, three, and a  
hundred followed,*

*Chanting and teaching others.  
Propagation will unfold this way  
In the future as well.  
Does this not signify  
‘Emerging from the earth?’”  
(The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin, p. 385)*

*Now, in this intense struggle  
Of the new century,  
The next generation  
Of the young men’s division  
Has “emerged from the earth”  
And begun to shine.  
O the fresh energy  
Of this great multitude!  
O their joyous dance,  
Which we have eagerly anticipated!  
(July 20 World Tribune, p. 7)*

It is clear that our mission as young men is to spearhead propagation as Bodhisattvas of the Earth. Just as President Ikeda led each campaign, we must take the lead in propagation. Let’s seek even more training and become the most dependable young men.

**WENDY DESOUZA  
SGI-USA YOUNG WOMEN’S LEADER**

Congratulations on the 50th anniversary of the establishment of the young women’s division! I would like to offer the following poem to all of you in recognition of your sincere efforts, as well as the efforts of the generations that came before us. Please accept it as a small token of my deepest appreciation.

*Young Women  
Hearts fully opened  
No need for pomp or glory that fades with time  
No need for envy, rather students of uncovering the beauty  
That is jiyu*

*The only comparison is how we were yesterday —  
“When you look at those of superior capacity,  
do not disparage yourself. . .  
Conversely, when you compare  
yourself with persons of inferior capacity,  
do not be arrogant and overproud”  
(The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin, p. 62).  
Our vows may seem  
Like an angry sea of unfulfilled promises*

*Yet they are the placid waves  
Keeping us afloat till the sun breaks*

*Let's be stubborn about being victorious!  
Celebrate your own beauty, your profound mission  
And the universe laughs with you, cries with you*

*The path of mentor and disciple is sometimes a lonely road  
With scorching desert suns  
Parched and prickly cactuses  
Or maybe torrential rains  
Drowning in today's defeat  
There may be derelicts that try and divert us  
Posing as the real thing  
But we are not fooled*

*We already possess a connection to the mentor  
We already possess a profound understanding  
We already have the heart to lead others to happiness*

*“Single-mindedly chant  
Nam-myoho-renge-kyo  
And urge others to do the same;  
That will remain as the only memory of your present life  
In this human world” (WND, 64).*

*Uncompromised prayer, uncompromised dream  
Unquenchable seeking spirit for training  
A growing compassion for others, learning from the members  
A desire to unite even strange bedfellows*

*A woman poet once said,  
“Poetry is not a luxury”  
Our daily life must be lived with passion and strenuous effort  
Taking care of our health is not a luxury*

*If violent winds have swept through you  
If you have been robbed of your life  
Take back your life with determined prayer  
Sensei states:  
“If you were a victim of violence, please remember that  
no matter what, your value as an individual will never change.”  
“. . . those who have suffered the most  
or who have been saddened the most can become the happiest.”  
“Never let your suffering cause you to desert your true self”  
(The Way of Youth, pp. 152–153).*

*No matter your past  
No matter your race, nationality, your personal economy  
Your sexual orientation  
What you think you can or cannot do  
You are a Buddha, a disciple*

*I humbly salute you for your courage.*