

YOUNG MEN'S CONFERENCE 2001
EVERYTHING STARTS WITH YOU!
OUR MISSION AS YOUNG MEN IN THE 21ST CENTURY
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Renewed spirit of training: What does this mean? This was the question on the minds of the 121 young men who attended the first Young Men's Conference of the new millennium, held at the Florida Nature and Culture Center July 5–8. With the idea, "Everything starts with you! Our Mission as Young Men in the 21st Century," these young men were greeted by the bright Florida sun with smiles on their faces and determination in their hearts. Many of them met with tremendous difficulty and a myriad of obstacles before leaving for the FNCC.

The conference started with opening words by SGI-USA Young Men's Leader Steve Mortan, followed by a brief activity allowing the participants to get to know each other through sharing their hopes and dreams, both for the conference and their daily lives. SGI President Ikeda's newest poem, "O the Joyous Dance of Youth," written under the pen name of Shin'ichi Yamamoto, was read.

The next day was beautiful and hot, and the first of the four sessions, "Lecture for Generals," about the mentor–disciple relationship was given by SGI-USA Youth Leader James Herrmann. He shared stories of his own relationship with President Ikeda and relayed the three treasures of President Ikeda: his mentor, the Gohonzon and sincerity. He also said that the three qualities of a leader are a sense of taking full responsibility, a sense of mission and a sense of challenge. He challenged the young men to not only take full responsibility for their lives and kosen-rufu, but also to find other young men to foster and train.

"Soka Spirit: Standing Up Against Injustice" was presented by the young men of Central Zone. It started out with a skit based on *The Late Show With David Letterman*, and broke into small discussion groups. The responses from these groups were then compiled and the following determinations resulted: 1) We will protect our mentor in life, President Ikeda, no matter what. 2) We will protect our organization and fellow members. 3) We will do whatever we can to assure victory in the Soka Spirit movement.

"Leadership: Seeking Spirit and Unity," was presented by Southern California Zone. Even though it was late at night, everyone left with an energized life-condition. There was a definite feeling of unity and a mutual spirit to seek training.

Later, there was a special training meeting held with SGI-USA Gajokai Leader Eric Freedman, Steve Mortan and James Herrmann. Over half of the participants joined, even though it was voluntary. It was a Q-and-A session relating to the true spirit of working behind-the-scenes. In this meeting, the "bar was raised" for the participants, who left with fresh determinations and an understanding of the real aspect of participating in Soka Group and Gajokai.

The final session, "*Shakubuku*: A Way of Life" presented by Northern California Zone, started off with experiences about propagating Buddhism. James Herrmann encouraged everyone to introduce one person to Buddhism by the end of the year. This session ended with each participant having a new realization of what it means to propagate this Buddhism as a young man in America.

The preliminaries for the National YMD Basketball Competition were held as

well. The basketball competition was a success. At the end, it boiled down to the Florida Region team and Atlanta Region team. Florida stole the show and the trophy, winning by two points. Phillip Davis, Norb Logsdon and Louis Logsdon of the Florida Region team are the national three on three basketball champions for 2001. Congratulations, guys!

The evening closed with a talent show, which included original music, a rhythmic rapper, a body builder and a live dance performance of “Vogue,” among other performances.

Sunday was the end of the conference, and with the impressions that were shared, it was clear that everyone had a tremendous breakthrough and a renewed spirit to seek training. Paul Shaffer walked the grounds sharing everything he could with everyone, even the birds and fish saying that he was sure that even those animals would be reborn as human beings fighting for kosen-rufu. Mike Fujie feels that not only was this the most incredible conference he has been to, but that “this is about a new chapter in the kosen-rufu movement.”