

IMPRESSIONS FROM THE YOUTH PERFORMING GROUPS CONFERENCE

Traci Wilson, San Francisco

Upon my return from the Florida Nature and Culture Center, I thought of words like action, sincerity, faith, dialogue and friendship, but the word that captured the essence of each moment was reflection.

I took a week to go over in my mind all of the wonderful sessions we had with youth from around the nation. Not only were the sessions well-facilitated, the energy that permeated from the participants was phenomenal. I was impressed with how most of the youth involved in the dialogues were sharing such personal experiences without hesitation—just being pure and honest. I admired how each person shared from their hearts.

My experience at the FNCC this year was much deeper than I expected. I felt a larger sense of responsibility for all of the members, especially, the youth from San Francisco. I was proud to take action for the safety and well being of all the members. I discovered a new sense of appreciation for the youth I met for the first time and deepened the bonds of appreciation with youth I already knew.

In going to the FNCC, I thought the struggles I had were overwhelming, but hearing the amazing experiences and struggles that many of the teens were encountering and overcoming was inspirational. Everyone at this conference helped me see through my struggles and develop as a kind and sincere person.

Dywana Denk, Los Angeles

This year I will be graduating into the women's division. The Youth Performing Groups Conference at the FNCC was my last conference as a youth member. I started twirling the baton in the Fife and Drum Corps when I was 11, and then moved on to drill team. At 19, I joined drill dance (now called dance crew).

When the plane landed in Florida, my heart started pumping faster. I knew it would be a reunion with members who had attended other conferences with me.

We received amazing guidance and encouragement from SGI President Ikeda. He explained that as a performance group, we are ambassadors of the SGI. We shoulder the mission as vanguards of the SGI's cultural movement and, as such, we should strive to inspire hope and touch the hearts of everyone in the audience. To accomplish this, the performers must be full of hope and courage. The character of the performer transmits directly to the hearts of the people. This is why we must achieve a revolution in our life conditions based on faith.

Along with this incredible direction, I have made lasting bonds of deep friendships with people across the country. I have fantastic memories of the FNCC, from the bikes, to the food, to the content of the sessions, the talent shows and going to the beach. The feelings I have in my heart are there forever.

Thank you, President Ikeda, for creating a place where such amazing things happen!

Andrew Ijichi, New York

I had a great time at the Youth Performing Groups Conference. I am a trumpet player and this was my first time at the FNCC. It is a place where all youth can go to understand what it means to be a Buddhist. The people I met there were warm and I felt like we are all part of a family. I was encouraged by the youth because of their hope, courage and confidence. I could see it just by looking at them.

From now on, I'm determined to chant for others and I pray to be able to encourage them. I would like to share my life with all the world.

J.J. Chien, Columbus, Ohio

I was very moved by both the study materials at the conference, as well as the people who shared their lives with us. Many people had great hardships before arriving in Florida—some of them were life and death. To hear how they worked so hard to overcome them really encouraged me and made me determined to fight harder.

The performances at the talent show were truly amazing. I could feel the spirit that President Ikeda talks about in the “Precepts for Brass Band (Music Corps),” when he writes: “It is my request that all of you, without uttering a word, will be able to move your listeners to deep emotion. Through your performances, I hope that you will move people to jubilation, and inspire them to attain their human revolution.”

Because of this conference, I feel recharged and have gained some momentum to carry back and fuel our family youth festival. The things I learned at the conference really gave me the courage to face daily obstacles, and I am determined to bring back the FNCC spirit, take our festival's performances to the next level and share the same spirit President Ikeda talks about with the audience.