

VOICES: How can we break down racial barriers in the workplace or in our communities?

Members from Midwest Joint Territory respond:

My training as a doctor brought me from Thailand to Kansas City, Kans., three years ago. I work in a multiracial environment in a children's hospital. As SGI President Ikeda has said, you should "regard the place where you are as the best stage for you." My practice gives me confidence that I can prove myself to be a valuable person whom other people can trust and respect. When problems occur, I know it's time for me to go back to the Gohonzon and pray for the happiness of people in my environment.

— PORNCHAI KINGWATANAKUL, Kansas City, Kans.

Racial discrimination seems second nature or even inborn to humanity. However, as Buddhists, we know that there is Buddhahood in each one of us, and therefore neither superiority nor inferiority exists among the races. Knowing this profound truth, we, as Buddhists, should continue to breakdown the racial barriers by respecting the people around us at work and in the community, regardless of color or race, and encouraging others to act the same way.

— YANG KIM, St. Louis, Mo.

I teach at an elementary school that has an African American population of approximately 70 percent. Many of my students had negative feelings for Asian people because they had never met any on a personal level. My Buddhist practice has allowed me to bring some of my SGI-USA members to my classroom to interact with my students. Now my students have positive feelings for Japanese people and wish to learn more about their culture. The experiences my students had with SGI-USA members can't be learned in textbooks.

— RAMONA WILLIAMS, St. Louis, Mo.

As overseer of the citizen complaint process against police officers, I apply the powers of faith and practice to break down racial barriers. I chant for wisdom to change the negative perceptions the public have against the police and vice-versa. I have incorporated a mediation piece into the investigative process whereby the police and citizens discuss as a team the causes of disagreements and find solutions to problems. This interaction has created mutual respect between citizens and police officers.

— PEARL FAIN, Kansas City, Mo.

I am an international student advisor at the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire. Historically, there has been a lot of tension between international offices and multicultural offices. I have refused to feed into this negativity, respecting the inherent dignity of each human being, including myself. I wrote a grant with the multicultural office to fund a retreat for international, American multicultural and American majority students. It has been a complete success! This now annual event has not only resulted in more multicultural students studying abroad, but has built a bridge between people who didn't mix before. The spirit of striving for genuine dialogue triumphs again!

— HILDA M. MOLESKI, Eau Claire, Wis.

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Subject: World Tribune 03/14/97 n.3130 p.2 WT970314p02

Author:

Keywords: barriers break communities Discrimination Diversity down Experiences January June Opinion Prejudice racial Racism Tribune Voices workplace World