

## Reorganization Leads to New Friendships

By IRLENE OWADA

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At first glance, it looked more like a geography class than a Buddhist meeting. When Boulder Chapter leaders first gathered last fall to discuss their reorganization into neighborhood groups, they focused on a large map of Boulder County, which covers 742 square miles of the Great Plains and Rocky Mountains. Tiny colored pins showed where all the members were, with each color representing a different district.

"We really wanted to make it easier for the members here to practice," explained Kristi Bennett, the Boulder Chapter leader.

Some of the first planning meetings took place at Ms. Bennett's new home in Louisville, Colo. A 25-year SGI member and long-time resident of Boulder, she had just moved to the Louisville/Lafayette area, about eight miles to the southeast.

"When we started looking at the map, I was amazed at how many members lived in Boulder and was even more amazed at how many members lived in the Louisville and Lafayette area," she said. The biggest concentration of members was in Boulder, where many students attend Colorado University.

Boulder Chapter comprises four districts. Longmont District, about 12 miles north of Boulder, was already well-defined geographically, so everyone agreed it would stay as it was. The other three districts were spread out, overlapping one another, over a large area from Boulder to its eastern neighbors on the plains, Louisville and Lafayette, to the surrounding mountain towns of Nederland and Jamestown.

In the past, when new students came to Boulder, they were divided equally among the nearby three districts to balance out the youth. But few had cars, extra money or time to spend on transportation. And it was difficult to get to meetings, which were about 20 minutes away. This meant that someone with a car had to go to Boulder and pick up the students to take them to the meetings and then take them home again. Members never complained because they were happy to have young people at their meetings, but people felt it should be easier for the students to go to meetings.

"At the very first reorganization meeting, it was a unanimous conclusion that it was a good time to start the neighborhood meetings," Ms. Bennett said. After several more planning meetings with district and chapter leaders, it was time to propose the plan to the members themselves, taking care not to make anyone feel like they had to change districts.

A questionnaire with computerized maps showing different proposals to reorganize were prepared and given to each member at a meeting on the CU campus.

"About 30 people from the three districts came to that meeting," Ms. Bennett said, "and we got a lot of input from them on how they felt about the reorganizing of the chapter."

"I really liked the meeting; it was like seeing kosen-rufu take place because everyone was working together to make it happen," Leigh Kennicott, a doctoral student, said.

One proposal called for one of the district's meetings to take place right on campus. Several students said they liked the idea of meeting at CU because they didn't have cars and it was awkward to always ask for rides.

Another student said she liked to ask friends to come to meetings, but when she told them the meetings were off campus, they hesitated.

Pros and cons about meeting on campus were discussed, as the members considered issues like parking for non-students, privacy for doing gongyo and daimoku, and caring for a portable altar.

Sven Hillering said that keeping the students together in one district rather than splitting

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them up all over Boulder has been a boon to their practice.

“This is what SGI President Ikeda is talking about when he speaks of kosen-rufu — it’s a network of friends,” he said. “More and more I get a sense that rather than just being a leader and chanting for some people, that now these are my best friends.”

The meetings they’ve had since have been successful. People have acclimated pretty well.

“The district has a whole schedule worked out for at least six months,” Ms. Bennett said. “Not only that, but because their meetings are on campus no one has to worry about cleaning their house or what to do with the kids.”

Ms. Bennett says she feels the reorganization has helped people to grow and has brought members back into the organization. A member who had been out of contact for some years was recently reconnected.

“A member ran into him and told him there were meetings right in Lafayette,” she said. “He was excited to hear that. And because the meetings were so close by, he started showing up. Now there’s a whole network for him to connect to.”

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