

**When My Life Got Crowded**  
**By MADDY PLUHAR YALOWITZ**  
**Northampton, Mass.**

SGI President Ikeda has encouraged YWD members to “actively participate in meetings and, through your presence, ensure that each meeting is warm, cheerful and compassionate. Never forget that this serves as unspoken encouragement for all of your fellow members....” When I was appointed as Harvard District YWD leader two years ago, I resolved to make a fresh start taking President Ikeda’s guidance to heart. It gave me a powerful sense of mission. I felt it was up to me to ensure that my members would grow in happiness and capability for their sakes and for that of the district, as well.

The first thing I did was chant about each of the members. There were two, at first; over two years, four more joined the district. I made a determination card with their names and chanted for them every day. This kept me open to them when my life got crowded with other responsibilities — it helped me remember their obstacles and goals, and to see their Buddha nature. Over time, I have developed a deep sense of caring for them. On home visits I pray that I can encourage them somehow and that we can become closer friends.

Preparing presentations for our discussion meetings together has been a very effective way to get to know one another, have fun and enhance our wisdom. I always find a way to travel to meetings and activities together with these YWD members.

We also get together just to hang out, on the rare occasions when time allows. Over time, comfortable, warm friendships have grown among all of us.

Meanwhile, each young woman has overcome obstacles and most have shared their experiences at meetings. I have, too. Since joining Harvard District, my life has been full of responsibilities and struggles outside the district. These have included dealing with the unexpected death of my father in the Philippines last spring, striving to save my marriage over the last eight months and advancing in a full-time master’s degree program over the past two years.

I have seen every young woman in the district expand her state of happiness and deepen her faith. These members bring their energy to the discussion meetings — in the two years we have been practicing together as a district, Harvard District has achieved a beautiful sense of friendship.

Our discussion meetings are very well attended, vibrant and joyful. By the end of our meetings, everyone is talking with one another across divisions, guests are smiling and laughing and everybody is energized. I am deeply grateful to the YWD members of Harvard District, who strive so sincerely to emanate Buddhahood in every aspect of their lives.

**WT**