

My Mission — Opening Communication
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The topic “diversity” encompasses many different meanings and causes a broad spectrum of reactions from people. The tremendous reactions to diversity within my life sparked a wonderful quest — the quest for human dignity within varying and conflicting peoples and their respective ideas.

My children are multiracial — their heritage includes African American, Danish American and Oglala Sioux. Living in the Midwest presented a challenge in their upbringing. My way of teaching my children to cope in a positive way with the inevitable racism they would encounter was to teach them of heroic and positive examples of each of their respective nationalities. My purpose was to inspire in my children not only a sense of pride and self-esteem for who they are but also to instill in them an equal sense of respect for members of other cultures. This method has proven successful in that my children and I have overcome much negativity and created an environment of trust and openness within our family and neighborhood.

As I continued raising my children and becoming more aware of the ethnocentrism present in our society, I resolved to return to college and learn all I could to help teach cultural awareness and respect in today’s society. I am currently in my third year of college pursuing a bachelor’s in sociology. Upon graduation, I intend to fulfill a lifelong dream of achieving a master’s in cultural diversity.

My university life is rich with a multitude of international students, ideas and personalities. Hand in hand with this richness travel cultural clashes, feelings of alienation and distrust, and further gaps between people. As a member of the SGI-USA for over 20 years, I have developed a deep love and respect for the many cultures I have been exposed to through my SGI life. I now strive to engage in dialogue with people of differing cultures. I initiate conversation among persons who have hurt each other based not on intent but on misunderstanding. I constantly seek to learn more about the vast range of peoples in my environment. I pray to utilize the wisdom gained from my practice of Nichiren Daishonin’s Buddhism and SGI President Ikeda’s guidance to put out the fires, both large and small, that burn needlessly between people.

I have learned through painful experience that, despite my idealistic goals, I contain prejudiced attitudes that are part of my socialization. Through initiating dialogues with people from other parts of the world, I have also learned some find my beliefs and habits as shocking and distasteful as I do theirs. I continuously challenge myself to be open-minded and develop the ability to listen and learn without making judgments. Within our society, I find the general practice to be one of “different is less.” This attitude presents a serious problem when people come together, as feelings of alienation and distrust result. I am learning of different lifestyles and ways of handling problems that were beyond my realm of knowledge. Some of these customs I have adopted because of their positiveness; some I disagree with totally. I also am practicing the right to disagree with others without any negativity attached.

As we approach the 21st century, I feel it is crucial to implement cultural diversity awareness as well as how to create harmony among varying cultures. Areas wherein diversity awareness, education and respect are crucial to the well-being of humanity are medical, legal and educational. I have talked to people in the medical field whose ignorance of other cultures leads to frustration on their part and less-than-effective medical treatment. In discussing diversity with attorneys, they, too, experience frustration in trying

to effectively counsel their culturally diverse clients.

One heartbreaking example I can relate dates back to a year ago when a 5-year-old child burned to death. The firemen had no knowledge of the language, hence couldn't successfully call the child out from hiding. This particular tragedy led to my Spanish professor voluntarily instructing our fire department in rudimentary Spanish. Although tragic, this points out the types of problems cultural ignorance can produce. Hopefully, the attitude of my professor will someday typify the reactions of our society and its collective determination to stop similar incidents from occurring.

I am tremendously proud to be a member of the SGI-USA. As a result of my Buddhist practice, I have chosen as my personal mission to work for the remainder of my life to open communication lines between the peoples of the world.

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