

Individual Happiness, Youth and Family To Be Focus in '98

Three activity guidelines for 1998 are outlined in the following excerpts from General Director Zaitso's speech to the Central Executive Committee, Dec. 4, at the Florida Nature and Culture Center. Mr. Zaitso related 10 visions he has for the ideal organization in 2001 (please see box, p. 5). While all 10 visions need to be continually addressed for the next four years, he urged that in 1998 the SGI-USA concentrate on three specific areas, devising new plans in these areas based on prayer. These guidelines were later adopted by the SGI-USA Council.

In 1998 — the Year of Victory of the People for the New Century — the SGI-USA will focus on three major areas: supporting members' quests for happiness, nurturing youth and strengthening families.

Happy Members

When we talk about supporting members' quests for happiness, what do we really mean? We want to help the members show clear actual proof of their faith, carry out activities with conviction, strongly grasp Buddhist principles and be able to share these concepts with others. SGI President Ikeda has said: "When we have absolute confidence that we can definitely overcome any and all sufferings through faith in the Gohonzon, our lives are bathed in the light of boundless hope, and limitless strength wells forth. This is the strongest and most secure way of life."

For members to achieve this state of life, they need to have a solid practice of the basics: abundant daimoku, consistent practice of gongyo, the spirit to learn, and a spontaneous joy to share the power of faith in the Daishonin's Buddhism. Other important points include having the type of faith that continually challenges specific goals, having a seeking mind for guidance in faith, and a sense of personal responsibility for kosen-rufu.

What specific strategies can we use to accomplish this first goal of happy members with strong faith?

Here are our national plans:

- **Study** — Since study is the foundation of strong faith, and hence our happiness, the Study Department will play an important role this year. The Study Department has revised and strengthened its study program. By supporting this program, especially the Entrance Exam in April 1998, we can help ensure that our members grasp this profound Buddhist philosophy.

The Study Department is also looking into improving its study program in various ways, including developing new and better study materials, such as books, pamphlets and CDs. Also, the Study Department wants to develop a lecturers training program and a more in-depth new members series for people who have decided to join the SGI-USA.

Also, each region and division is asked to consider the following:

- **A "calendar revolution"** — Person-to-person interaction is an important way to help members strengthen their basics of faith and practice. However, many times leaders are too busy in planning meetings and other administrative meetings. It is hoped that all regional and divisional leaders will comb through their calendars, eliminating unnecessary meetings

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and making as much time as possible available for one-to-one dialogue with the members.

- **Propagation activities and seminars** — It is suggested that local organizations develop activities specifically designed to introduce new people to our organization and teach them the greatness of the Daishonin's Buddhism. This is in addition to regular discussion meetings and the in-depth new members series the Study Department will develop. It is also suggested that seminars on propagation be held in each area with the goal of helping people learn how to share this Buddhism with their friends.
- **Opportunities to teach** — The best way to deepen our understanding about Buddhism is to teach others, and naturally, propagation allows us to do this. But it is also suggested that each region create further ways to get more people involved in giving various types of study presentations.
- **Studying the temple issue** — Temple issue study meetings are encouraged on the grass-roots level so that even the newest member can understand and confidently share with others the essence of the issue.

Nurturing Youth

The second area of focus for next year is the developing and nurturing of youth. This means many things, including helping young people understand the connection of faith to their lives and making the organization relevant and appealing to them — to make it “cool” or “awesome,” so to speak. It also means to help youth increase their commitment and sense of mission, to tap their passion and creativity and to increase their influence throughout the organization. The idea is to give hope to the youth, especially teenagers, and help them increase their capability to contribute positively to our society.

To further this end, several new initiatives are proposed:

- **A national, four-divisional task force** — In 1998, the national organization will form a task force to tackle the issue of how best to nurture youth. We plan to include people of all four divisions as well as professionals in the fields dealing with youth, such as teachers and counselors.

Some ideas they will consider are: redefining the age range of the youth division; programs to help older youth division members make the transition to the men's and women's divisions and for Boys and Girls Group graduates to enter the youth division; mentoring programs for young people; interest “clubs” for young people, to which they can easily bring their friends and where they can make new friends.

Once this task force is formed, we will welcome all input and ideas.

- **Increased four-divisional involvement** — Please discuss this thoroughly in each region and division. The men's and women's division members are asked to take an active role in raising young people, including: supporting the youth division's efforts to develop youth leaders in the districts; home visits on youth; introducing young people to the practice; encouraging youth to get involved in activities; and helping with transportation to district and youth activities.

Strengthening Families

The third area is strengthening the family. One fundamental reason for faith is to create happy families, which come in all forms. A happy family is one in which all the

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relationships are based on love, respect and caring. This caring is not limited to just our own family but is spread to others.

In those families with children, parents who are showing actual proof can surely raise their children to be successors in faith. And certainly Gakkai activities can play an important role in making a happy family life.

Again, here are some of our national plans:

- **Publications** — To support this focus on the family, the Publications Department will include more materials on relationships and family in the *World Tribune* and *Living Buddhism*. It will also work toward other books to support families, such as children's books, a collection of guidance on relationships and family, and volumes containing President Ikeda's popular "Discussions on Youth."
- **Research committee** — The national organization will also form a research committee, to include professionals experienced in family issues, to help find ways to make our organization more family friendly.

And the regions are asked to consider:

- **Seminars** — Family matters can be some of the most difficult to deal with. Therefore I urge that each region, using the talent of the members or friends of the SGI, conduct seminars on various issues related to the family.
- **Family activities** — As part of the calendar revolution mentioned earlier, it is suggested that each region plan monthly activities that the whole family can enjoy together. It is also suggested that you consider making significant days in our religion — such as Feb. 16, April 28 or Oct. 12 — traditional family celebrations.

These are some suggestions and strategies to consider. We hope that everyone will employ new ways of thinking, along with renewed determination and prayer, to develop fresh ideas to accomplish these goals in your local organizations.

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