

Diversity Workshops Target Racism
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Nationally, the SGI-USA and the Culture Department are focusing on developing a spirit of tolerance for diversity within our organization. In fact, one of the principles of the recently adopted SGI Charter reads that the SGI “shall respect cultural diversity and promote cultural exchange, thereby creating an international society of mutual understanding and harmony” (Cultural diversity refers to a wide range of differences among people including race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, religion, national origin, social status, age and physical/mental impairment.)

In response to this thrust, the Washington, D.C., Region Culture Department in June 1997 established a committee and named it “Jiyu” to reflect its mission of awakening us to our true selves. Based on the concept as set forth in President Ikeda’s poem “The Sun of *Jiyu* Over A New Land,” *jiyu*, literally “to emerge from the Earth,” embodies the notion of awakening to our fundamental true self as a Buddha, bringing forth the qualities of compassion, respect, fairness and honesty, and then teaching others in society to exhibit their true selves as well. Thus, emerging from the Earth of our true identity and going forth to teach others is the mission of the Jiyu Committee.

One result of this committee’s work is a new series of workshops designed to train a cadre of Culture Department leaders and members in cultural diversity. Like taking a mini-course, the initial group will complete a sequence of sessions held each month.

The basic model is one of training the trainers. Upon completion of the training sequence, it is expected that this group of members, working with co-facilitators, will conduct low-risk diversity training sessions with other members of the Culture Department and eventually with chapter, area and region leaders as a component of the latter’s ongoing leadership training.

The committee’s ultimate aim is to develop a resource bank consisting of human and material resources for use by the general membership in diversity training. Material resources will include a manual of guidance, readings, standard exercises and videos, and the human resources consist of the members experienced in diversity education and training. In these ways the committee is striving to foster respect for diversity throughout the Washington, D.C., Region.

The success of these efforts is beginning to be felt and is reflected in one participant’s comments after a recent workshop. “The dialogue phase in the small groups afforded me the opportunity to express some deep feelings I’ve had for years but kept inside,” Angela Baden said. “It was such a personal and cleansing experience for me. The fact that my words were listened to in such a setting gave me a feeling of hope that, I believe, can only be achieved in the SGI. We’re working toward the same goal, so those who sincerely want world peace based on Nichiren Daishonin’s teachings are the ones who are willing to listen and talk and change from within to achieve this goal.”

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