

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS
SGI-USA Focuses on Nov. 18 Commemorative Meetings

*Why are we holding meetings
commemorating Nov. 18?*

Why is it important for youth to participate in these activities?

*How can we create a
successful district meeting?*

Richard Sasaki, SGI-USA men's division leader: It was on Nov. 18, 1930, that Tsunesaburo Makiguchi established the Soka Gakkai. An educator and pacifist, he was imprisoned during World War II for his opposition to the war and his unwavering commitment to religious freedom. He died in prison on Nov. 18, 1944. His disciple, Josei Toda, also went to jail and emerged from prison just before the war ended to rebuild the Soka Gakkai as its second president. By the time of his death in 1958, Mr. Toda had seen the Soka Gakkai grow to more than 750,000 households. His young disciple, Daisaku Ikeda, became the third president and led its growth internationally to its current state with more than 12 million members practicing in 128 countries.

Nov. 18 has become the day when we celebrate this great history of the Soka Gakkai, an organization that has stood on the side of the common people and resolves to live up to the tradition of the three successive presidents.

I think it is appropriate that we commemorate Nov. 18 in our districts, for the district has been the center stage for all SGI activities. Throughout its history, the district has been the place where members gather to encourage one another and share this Buddhism with their friends. In *The New Human Revolution*, SGI President Ikeda stressed the important tradition of the discussion meeting, writing: "It was at the discussion meeting, too, that presidents Makiguchi and Toda shared the suffering of those in the poorest and most abject circumstances and launched the struggle for the widespread propagation of the Daishonin's Buddhism. This grass-roots movement has been the most essential underpinning of the Soka Gakkai until today."

Of course, some areas will choose to have meetings by group or chapter, etc. In any case, I hope we can have successful commemorative meetings across America where we can refresh our spirit to work for the benefit of others and carry on the proud tradition of the SGI.

Renu Jiandani, SGI-USA young women's division leader: When I first joined, I didn't fully understand what a district was and why it was important for me to attend district activities. However, I was warmly encouraged by the men's and women's division members, especially the women, to participate in presentations and take part in district activities. Among the very first presentations I did was one on the three treasures. I vividly remember my district leaders working with me all week, preparing dinner for me, chanting with me, and having stimulating discussions about my presentation.

At that time, being new to the practice, I was chanting solely for material benefits. But thanks to this presentation and the discussions and study it entailed, I came to understand that besides material things, treasures of the storehouse, there were two other treasures, those of the body and those of the heart. And I grasped that the treasures of the heart are the most important. Understanding this point, my entire perspective about my life changed at an early stage in my practice as I strove to develop the treasures of the heart.

Title: SGI-USA Focuses on Nov. 18 Commemorative Meetings
Subject: World Tribune 10/23/98 n.3214 p.3 WT981023p03
Author:
Keywords: Commemorative Focuses Guidelines History Kosen-rufu Meetings National News Nov. Organization

Although youth activities inspired and motivated me, I learned the basics of faith, practice and study through my participation in district activities. I also developed close bonds with all the members there. Even though some have moved away, we still share this bond today. I realized that I have so much to learn from the men's and women's divisions and their wealth of experience.

Through my experience, I can clearly see the value of participating in district activities and the direct correlation this has to developing the basics of practice, which we can all apply in every aspect of our lives.

James Herrmann, SGI-USA young men's division leader: President Ikeda often stresses the importance of youth involvement in the district. In a recent essay, he referred to the front line of our organization as the "true battleground for kosen-rufu, the true place of Buddhist practice." From my experience, I feel it is also the true battleground for self-development.

The growth and development I experienced through my participation in the district have become great assets for my daily life. In my former profession as a registered nurse, communication with patients was a very crucial part of my job. Thanks to my efforts in the district to encourage and inspire others, I became a more effective nurse, helping my patients and their families through difficult illnesses.

By participating in the district meeting, I feel we can all learn and reinforce the basics of faith, practice and study. By actively participating, we develop our ability to carry out effective dialogue and learn how to care for others.

We often talk about creating a new era of development in the United States. The key to making this a reality, I honestly feel, weighs on our ability to develop ourselves in the district. SGI President Ikeda writes: "The youth are the hope and the life of the district. 'This young person is the pride of our district.' 'Our district is solid because of this person's presence.' Those who are valued in this way by the men's and women's division members may be called the true leaders of the next generation."

I feel that the best measure of whether we are successful as youth in creating a new era is how effective we are in creating joyful district meetings. Becoming the kind of person who is valued in the district is the surest way to develop the ability to become true leaders of the next century.

Wendy Clark, SGI-USA women's division leader: The district meeting is the place where all members can go to become refreshed after facing all the hardships of daily life. As President Ikeda writes in *The New Human Revolution*: "The discussion meeting is a miniature portrait of the Soka Gakkai. It might be described as an oasis in today's world where people from all walks of life, young and old, men and women alike, encourage one another and discuss the means for attaining happiness."

From my own experience, I think there are five important points we need to think about to create a successful district meeting.

The first point is district unity – it's important to include everyone in the planning. Ideally, it's great if the planning can be based on four-divisional unity. However, if there aren't four divisions in the district, it's important to try to get as many people involved as possible, especially youth.

The second point is preparation. The kind of preparation we make toward the district meeting will determine its success. That's why we have to begin our planning process with a prayer in front of the Gohonzon for the success of our meeting.

The third point is clear, advance communication. Given the busy pace of our lives, it is

Title: SGI-USA Focuses on Nov. 18 Commemorative Meetings

Subject: World Tribune 10/23/98 n.3214 p.3 WT981023p03

Author:

Keywords: Commemorative Focuses Guidelines History Kosen-rufu Meetings National News Nov. Organization

important that we let our members and guests know when the district meeting is going to be held as soon as possible. Closer to the date, you can follow up with reminder telephone calls. When we reach out to our members through telephone calls and home visits and share the plans for the meeting, we can encourage them to attend based on the details that have been developed. We can also use this as an opportunity to reach out to members we haven't seen in a long time, our friends, family or associates whom we may want to invite to the discussion meeting.

Fourth, youth participation in the district meeting adds an exciting, creative spirit. President Ikeda says: "Youth are more precious than any treasure. Let's foster youth and live with a youthful spirit. That's how to open up the future and make great development possible."

Fifth, it's very important to create an environment at the district meeting where every member and guest will feel welcome, can openly express themselves, sharing their struggles as well as their passions. We do this by having open dialogue and also by having our members share their personal experiences of joy in practicing this great Buddhism.

The success of each discussion meeting lies not only in the efforts of the leaders but in the efforts of all the members who participate. Through our prayers for the success of our district meetings and our actions to make it happen, we can create the type of joyful and encouraging meetings that inspire each of us to become happy and help others become happy as well.

WT