

**PEOPLE WITH FAITH AND CREATIVITY VITAL FOR AMERICA
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IN 1990, SGI President Ikeda set in motion his determination to provide all members the opportunity to discover self-motivated faith, to empower and strengthen our voices. He educated us to “world peace now,” of winning in our daily lives and building a foundation for the future, and began teaching us by his example how to care for an individual human being. An exhilarating breeze of wonderful fresh air swept through all of us in America!

Not coincidentally, in the morning before his first simulcast dialogue with the members, he inaugurated the SGI-USA Culture Department, encouraging us to become capable, trustworthy professionals for the sake of people everywhere. In the following months, he charged us to become “a lighthouse in society, respected and praised by others...to become a source of hope that will shed light on the darkness of humanity...a source of inspiration to others.” He asked us to become “the face of the new SGI-USA to society.”

In the succeeding nine years, Culture Department members under the direction of Gerry Hall accomplished truly remarkable victories in their personal and professional lives and also within the SGI-USA through many symposia, seminars and major exhibits, such as the exhibit on humanistic education seen by people across the country.

On January 30, twenty-six Culture Department leaders from across the United States gathered in the new Los Angeles Friendship Center for a one-day conference. We came together determined to lay the foundation for the new century with a Culture Department re-invigorated with a fresh understanding of its humanistic mission and a firm commitment to accomplishing our SGI-USA goals. Each of us profoundly felt our responsibility as we read President Ikeda’s message and marveled at how he had given us our blueprint for the day.

To the members of the SGI-USA Culture Department, who are travelling through the era of wisdom, congratulations on your departure under the new leadership of SGI-USA Culture Department Leader Eric Hauber.

In 1990, during the opening of a new era for American kosen-rufu, I formed the SGI-USA Culture Department. This was because I firmly believed that producing promising capable people equipped with faith and intellect would be vital for the development of America.

As we approach the twenty-first century, I would like each of you to deeply confirm this fundamental reason for the department’s formation by fostering a steady stream of capable people in your land of freedom who are brimming with hope.

I ask each of you, who are taking leadership for the next generation, to study Buddhism more deeply and seriously than ever before. Also, side by side with the members, please broaden the circle of dialogue filled with sincere encouragement, and assiduously polish your compassion and wisdom.

I am looking forward to meeting all of you, capable people of shining intellect, in the United States soon.

Having studied the guidance received in the early years and using President Ikeda's message as a compass, we set out to re-examine and refresh our mission statement, its objectives and the strategies that we have traditionally used to accomplish them. Initially as a group, we identified and listed those things that historically have caused us trouble. In balance, we likewise enumerated those items that brought us satisfaction and joy. We then broke into smaller groups. One examined anew the mission statement itself; others took a previous objective, revisiting its applicability and scope for the coming century, and discussing its implementation, using President Ikeda's message as a signpost. Re-grouping with points gleaned from our discussions posted on the walls, our committee of twenty-six set about the Herculean task of reaching both understanding and consensus about the final document we would share with Culture Department members nationwide. As living testimony to each person's good-heartedness and trust, together we accomplished an agenda few thought we could do in one day. The new Culture Department plan has been distributed throughout the country.

Our ultimate accomplishment in this conference was that twenty-six people, seeds of whats to come in the future, returned home with a renewed sense of being directly connected through the Culture Department. □