

## CHIBA TEMPLE SECEDES FROM HEAD TEMPLE

First branch temple to leave since May 1995 criticizes the head temple's quota-driven faith.'

Ho'on-ji, a Nichiren Shoshu branch temple in Chiba Prefecture, Japan, has seceded from the head temple. Chief Priest Kaido Kasamatsu notified the head temple of the Ho'on-ji board of directors' decision to secede on April 19. Ho'on-ji will remain an independent temple, not connected with the Soka Gakkai in any way, and Chief Priest Kasamatsu says he is ready to reestablish ties with Nichiren Shoshu if "the priesthood's administration policies and stance are restored to share the goal of faith as espoused by Ho'on-ji."

News of this first secession of a branch temple since May 1995 comes at a time when the priesthood is trying hard to start a major new campaign toward 2002, the 750th anniversary of the establishment of Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism. At that time, the head temple hopes to have 300,000 members attend a pilgrimage. The head temple is promising many renovations by that time, including a new facility to house the Dai-Gohonzon, and is thus trying to collect \$150 million — \$50 million a year — from its membership.

In Chief Priest Kasamatsu's April 19 letter to the head temple, he criticizes the priesthood for assigning numerical goals to branch temples, calling this "quota-driven faith." Toward 2002, the priesthood has been giving branch temples challenging targets for financial contributions, new members and pilgrimage attendance. Chief Priest Kasamatsu also questions the priesthood's view that the high priest's instructions are "the Daishonin's command," arguing that this is "nothing more than worship of the high priest and a view that equates the high priest with the Daishonin." He concludes that "there is clearly nothing other than the Gohonzon that we must believe in and follow," urging the priesthood to stop treating Nikken as if he were the object of worship.

— SHIN YATOMI