

'SOKA GAKKAI IN AMERICA' BOOK SIGNING HELD

Did you know that people join the SGI-USA not so much for the depth of Buddhist doctrine but primarily because of the people they meet? And that women in the SGI-USA are half as likely as nonmembers to be homemakers? Did you also know that there is a demand within the United States for transmodern religions such as Soka Gakkai Buddhism, a demand expected to continue growing?

These are some of the findings authors Phillip Hammond and David Machacek revealed in their new book about our organization, *Soka Gakkai in America: Accommodation and Conversion*, the first in-depth sociological study of SGI-USA members. More than 100 people eagerly listened to the findings in a two-hour presentation, Q-and-A discussion and book signing with the authors at the Los Angeles Friendship Center on July 10.

The book came about when Virginia Straus, executive director of the Boston Research Center for the 21st Century, realized the need for readily available and accurate data on the SGI-USA. She sought the advice of Brian Wilson, who authored a book about Soka Gakkai members in Great Britain titled *A Time To Chant*. Through Wilson's recommendation, Phillip Hammond of the University of California, Santa Barbara, was invited to submit a proposal for the survey. Subsequently, the book project was launched.

The results of the random-sample survey, which was distributed in April 1997, were based upon the analysis of 401 out of some 1,185 distributed questionnaires, as well as interviews conducted with SGI-USA members.

Soka Gakkai in America provides an independent yet promising overview of the SGI's history, practice and philosophy, and the growth of the SGI-USA also included is the 102-question survey. According to Hammond and Machacek's findings: "SGI-USA members will be interested to learn that while we locate their religion at the boundary of religious culture in America, it is the boundary looking ahead to the future.... SGI is close enough to the cultural center to be a reasonable alternative to the mainstream American religions but distinctive enough to make a singular contribution to the American religious market." *Soka Gakkai in America* is available through mail order and in SGI-USA bookstores.

— STEPHANIE CELANO