

DEAR SGI-USA MEMBERS,

My best regards and thanks to all of you as we aim to conclude this year with victorious general meetings commemorating Nov. 18, the day the Soka Gakkai was established in 1930. This goal coincides with our plan at the beginning of the year to use this final quarter of 1999 to focus on participation in our SGI-USA activities for kosen-rufu, specifically in our Nov. 18 Commemorative Meetings. To carry this out with joy and compassion, let's refresh the basics of our faith, practice and study by deepening our confidence in the Gohonzon, solidifying our conviction in the justice of the SGI and strengthening the front lines of our district organizations.

Our prayer, filled with compassion to dedicate ourselves to the happiness of others, is the starting point. This is practicing the essence of the Daishonin's Buddhism. "If you are of the same mind as Nichiren, you must be a Bodhisattva of the Earth.... Only I, Nichiren, at first chanted Nam-myoho-rence-kyo, but then two, three and a hundred followed, chanting and teaching others. Likewise, propagation will unfold this way in the future. Doesn't this signify 'emerging from the earth'?" (*The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, vol. 1, p. 93).

Another important action necessary to care for each person is to deepen our friendships with one another through home visits. SGI President Ikeda states: "It is our hearts that change others' hearts. Friendship changes people" (*For Today and Tomorrow*, p. 373). Taking the time to visit someone, at home or elsewhere, communicates that we really care. It also provides quality time to address specific issues. Members can share their dreams, their burdens and their questions — everything that is in their hearts. Herein lies the wonderful opportunity we have to help one another overcome problems, or develop conviction in our Soka Renaissance with regard to the temple issue, or remain in close communication despite job or other responsibilities that may prevent us from attending activities. These heart-to-heart exchanges are some of the important ways in which we can deepen our faith in the Gohonzon.

The desired result of our focus on participation is more than just increasing the number of participants at the district meeting. And it's more than simply increasing the number of home visits in preparation for the meeting. The real objective is to further develop trust and friendship, which will continue to enhance the atmosphere of our meetings — creating more joy and true camaraderie. In this way, let us extend our hand of friendship not only to our district members, but also to less involved members, temple members and guests.

I have come to realize that this is the Gakkai spirit; to care so much for each person that we will do our utmost to help them learn about the Daishonin's Buddhism and the SGI's movement. Exerting individual effort for the sake of other people's happiness is the key. It is exactly this wise effort for the happiness of others that invites friends to join our cause. It is this humane concern that demonstrates the genuineness of the SGI.

In conclusion, the Nov. 18 Commemorative Meetings can be held at the district or group level. Each region can decide what is most appropriate for its membership. Let's make these gatherings of friends the great final victory of 1999 that will propel us toward the new century.

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