

GENERAL DIRECTOR'S MESSAGE CARE FOR EACH MEMBER

Last month, as most of our readers may already know, Daniel Nagashima, was appointed the new General Director of SGI-USA. The previous General Director, Mr. Fred M. Zaitso, becomes SGI-USA's executive advisor.

Until now, Mr. Zaitso has been contributing to this magazine a monthly editorial called "Publisher's commentary." This month we have a final installment of this column from Mr. Zaitso, and Mr. Nagashima's first editorial contribution in his capacity as the SGI-USA's new general director.

Mr. Zaitso retains his title as publisher.

To all the readers of *Living Buddhism*, I hope that this auspicious year is the happiest and most significant one for all of you! Let me begin the new year by offering you all my warmest greetings.

Last month, I was appointed the SGI-USA General Director. Mr. Fred Zaitso has held that position for the past seven years, during a meaningful time of transition and development in our organization. With his leadership, all of us have truly developed ourselves and our beloved SGI-USA, to the point where we can say with confidence that we are ready to move into the 21st century. We did this together based on the guidance of SGI President Ikeda which he gave us during his historic visit in February of 1990. At that time, he asked us to "advance steadily with the awareness that you are laying the foundation for the next thousand years of the kosen-rufu movement in the United States." He asked us to remember that "the task of building the foundation of the castle of the Law, which will endure for a thousand years, is in the hands of the current generation of [SGI-USA] members" (March 1990 *Seikyo Times*, p. 9).

I did not fully understand the significance of his words at the time. However, now, ten years later, I believe that all of the difficulties, all of the struggles, and all of the hard work we have done has been exactly in accord with what President Ikeda said. Because of this, we can begin this new year confident that we have exerted ourselves to lay the foundation for kosen-rufu in the new millennium.

Mr. Zaitso, Mrs. Wendy Clark, as well as our first General Director Mr. George M. Williams and all the pioneer members, laid the foundation for the spread of Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism in our country based on President Ikeda's guidance. Through their efforts, we have something today that was almost unimaginable a few decades ago—an American Buddhist organization that is earning the trust and respect of people throughout our society. This is because we show the public a positive and engaged Buddhism that is committed to helping people become happy, and to generating a spiritual renaissance in America. We should not forget that we owe our deepest appreciation to all those pioneers who have dedicated their lives so that we could advance to this point. I sincerely believe that the only way we can repay the debt of gratitude we owe them is to protect this wonderful organization, this "castle of the Law" that they have built, and to build something even more wonderful on the foundation they have laid. I am determined to dedicate my life to that task, to building an SGI-USA that is a treasure of American society, and that gives all of us the greatest pride.

Assuming the responsibility of general director is a daunting challenge. The only way

for me to begin is to exert myself based on the guidance of our SGI President Ikeda and become a “servant of the members,” as he said in 1990:

A leader in an organization is not someone who stands above others but one whose role is to serve and support everyone else. This is something that the second Soka Gakkai President Josei Toda used to explain by saying, “Leaders are servants of the members.” In a sense, a true leader of kosen-rufu is one who is determined to sacrifice himself for the sake of the members. (March 1990, *Seikyo Times*, p. 50)

This is not simply a matter of how you act around others, it is a matter of heart. The determination in your heart to dedicate your life for others’ happiness—not seeking thanks or praise for yourself—is the heart of selfless dedication that was shown to us by the successive presidents of the Soka Gakkai. This heart gives rise to actions which generate growth in our membership, and in our lives. While American society tends to focus attention on the lives of the rich and famous, from the perspective of Buddhism, we should never forget that it is those who have dedicated their lives to serving others who are great and who will be respected. People like Martin Luther King, Jr., Mahatma Gandhi, Mother Theresa and Nelson Mandela stand as models of humanity for people throughout the world. Without showing the same kind of selfless dedication to serving people, no movie star, no national ruler, no multi-billionaire could hold such a place in people’s hearts.

Therefore, I am resolved to do whatever it takes to create an SGI-USA whose leaders are known throughout the world for their sincerity, concern, vision, and devotion to peoples’ happiness.

Next year, 2001, Soka University of America at Aliso Viejo will open its doors, marking an important step in realizing President Ikeda’s far-reaching dream of humanistic education. I am confident that this is only the beginning. As we continue our brilliant development, we will naturally create many important humanistic institutions, such as museums, music and cultural associations, or even research centers and think tanks devoted to improving our communities and creating peace. I hope all of you feel genuine confidence that our movement will certainly develop in such a meaningful and significant way.

Therefore, we need to continue to grow as a movement in terms of our capacity, in terms of the good fortune of the membership, and of course, in terms of size. This will only be possible if each one of us—as individuals—deepens our prayer, our joy, and our passion to work for this task. I pledge to do my best to meet and talk with as many of you as possible, even visiting you at home and meeting your families. I want to listen to your voices, learn your opinions and concerns, and share your sufferings and joys. What I learn from all of you—what we all learn from each other—will become the basis for creating a wonderful future for SGI-USA. I believe that this is what SGI President Ikeda expects of me, and what all of the SGI-USA members deserve.

Nichiren Daishonin expended every last ounce of his energy writing to his followers about this great Buddhism. Even when he ran out of paper and was cold and hungry, he found a way to write. SGI President Ikeda, too, has continued to pour his heart into speech after speech, book after book, article after article, with the sole intent of sharing with us his hope and vision for kosen-rufu. As general director and publisher, Mr. Zaitzu has written some eighty-five publisher’s commentaries for this magazine.

Now it is my opportunity to challenge myself in this area. My English is not perfect, and I ask the support and patience of the editors. In this column, I would like to share with you

my hopes, dreams, determinations and observations concerning our movement to communicate the philosophy of Nichiren Daishonin here in the United States. I will also be reviewing what I have learned from you, my precious fellow SGI-USA members and *Living Buddhism* readers, and from the example and encouragement of our mentor, President Ikeda.

Once again — Happy New Year to all of you! Thank you all in advance for your support and your continued readership.

Danny Nagashima
SGI-USA General Director