

## **PRIDE CELEBRATION PARADES 'IT'S ABOUT FREEDOM'**

### **San Francisco**

For the third year, 150 SGI-USA members participated in the San Francisco Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender Pride Celebration. This year's theme was "It's About Freedom." Seen by an estimated 750,000 people, the parade was televised in its entirety on a local station.

All weekend long (June 24–25), members answered questions and passed out materials on Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism at an information booth. Guests were invited to an introductory event on July 9, and about 100 people signed up to be on a mailing list.

As in previous years, heart-to-heart dialogue with current temple and non-practicing members was the highlight of the weekend. New friendships were forged, and old ones were rekindled. The Pride Celebration weekend was indeed a chance for many to renew their commitment to community-wide kosen-rufu.

—*DIANA ELROD*

### **Houston**

For the first time ever, more than 50 SGI-USA members from Houston, Dallas and Austin participated in Houston's Pride Parade on June 24 at 9 p.m. The parade, which has been taking place since 1975, drew more than 100,000 people this year and is the second largest parade in the city. Participants included other religious organizations, businesses, banks, political figures such as Houston mayor Lee Brown and city leaders and supporting organizations such as P-FLAG (parents and friends of lesbians and gays).

Our message was that everyone has the Buddha nature, that we celebrate diversity and that everyone is unique and precious in their own wonderful ways.

—*JAVIER P. BERRIOS*

### **Columbus, Ohio**

Eighteen members and friends marched June 24 under the banners "SGI-USA Buddhists for Human Rights" and "Enlightenment As We Are" in Columbus Pride 2000. Hearts were opened, old divisions disappeared, friendships were rekindled, greater understanding was gained, new friendships were formed and years of struggle, dialogue and prayer melted into the harmony of a common goal: to bring our Buddhist values and the understanding of Buddhism to the greater community.

The members have been meeting since May 1997 to encourage one another in faith and to help bring back members who left the organization and as a way of introducing new people to the richness of Buddhist practice and the power of the Gohonzon.

—*LINDA THORNBURG*

### **Chicago**

In the midst of an estimated 300,000 onlookers, the Midwest's Central Zone, which includes the regions Chicago #1, Chicago #2 and Great Lakes, took part in its first Pride Parade.

Under a banner that said "SGI-USA: Buddhism, Happiness and Pride," more than 90 marchers from Chicago, Michigan, Minnesota and Indiana danced to the lively and nonstop drums of the Women's Division Drummers.

Onlookers eagerly reached for bookmarks that were passed along the parade route that explained our organization and its purpose.

SGI-USA General Director Danny Nagashima sent his congratulations in response to a request for a message: "I commend each of you for your efforts to support the community and make our organization known throughout society.

"SGI President Ikeda has written: 'Buddhism teaches that all living beings are noble and worthy of respect. In that sense, human rights have been at the very core of Buddhist philosophy from the beginning.... There is no discrimination in the vast, boundless compassion of Buddhism. There are no restrictions or exceptions.'

"Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism celebrates the dignity and value of each human life. It is a teaching that cherishes vibrant and beautiful contributions each person can make for a better society. I am so happy that through your participation, you can share this wonderful conviction with people.

"America is a nation which contains diverse people, cultures, traditions and lifestyles. It is the conviction of the SGI that this diversity and vitality is a source of hope for humanity in the new millennium. That is why our organization is a celebration of human life.

"Today, share with society our great conviction. Through your smiles and bright, cheerful life-conditions, show many people how great the SGI is, and how great is the philosophy of peace and humanism we embrace."

—BARBARA MCBEE

### **Boston**

I had a great time marching in Boston's 30th annual Pride Parade with the New England contingent, in spite of the 90-degree weather because I had my hat, my bottle of water and my determination to support fellow SGI members.

Last year was my first time marching. I was uncomfortable about being seen in the parade, thinking that people would presume I was gay. I wondered, at first, if that really was the issue. Then I realized the discomfort was about not wanting to be identified with people who continue to endure ridicule, exclusion or worse. What if someone mistreats me because I'm with "them"? I was afraid. Instinctively, I didn't feel safe, yet my determination to support our members became greater than my fear.

My point is that gay pride is about trumpeting human equality on all levels: freedom, happiness and dignity to which we all have a right simply because we are human beings.

—ROBIN TISH

### **Seattle**

Forty SGI-USA members marched in Seattle's Freedom Day Parade on June 25. It was truly joyous to be so graciously welcomed by the crowds. For five hours after the march, we had 25 members staffing our booth, which was one of the busiest during the event, where we passed out materials on Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism and invitations to an introductory meeting.

Our introductory meeting on July 9 was a great success, with 15 guests and 47 members participating. People were encouraged by the great experiences and performances, and many guests signed up to come to future meetings.

—REGINA HOOK

### **Philadelphia**

Philadelphia members marched in the Pride Day 2000 Celebration Parade on June 11

despite the extreme temperatures that neared 100 degrees. Approximately 40 members supported the SGI information table set up at the end of the parade route, remaining at the event all day and distributing information that included *The Winning Life* book.

As a follow-up to the event, an introductory meeting was held at the Philadelphia Community Center on June 24 with about 30 participants, including seven guests.

—JEANNETTE A. DAMIANI

### **New York**

New York members participated for the first time in the Heritage of Pride Parade on June 25, carrying a spectacular red, blue and yellow banner that said “SGI-USA, Buddhists for Peace, Culture and Education.” They were cheered along the four-mile parade route by a warm and enthusiastic crowd.

Lucretia Evans and her daughter Tiffany, who marched together, said: “This was a historical event for New York, so we had to be present and participate. We have learned that to do wrong and to do nothing is one and the same thing. We had to participate in introducing SGI-USA and the Gohonzon to our community.” Garfield Moore, a member and spectator, pointed out that “this is a very significant step for New York. It is a positive and bold statement in favor of the diversity of the organization.” Doris Leddy, a mother and participant, said: “I feel that I am making history. I am so proud of being a part of the SGI and a part of the parade.” Blane Mosley, a member and participant, said: “Seeing the support of the community and having the members come together to accomplish such a great event reinforces my faith that I am in the right place to grow.”

—VANDA JAMISON, JAMES BRODEUR AND RAY PETTY