

**THANK YOU FOR ALL YOUR HARD WORK  
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SGI-USA GENERAL DIRECTOR**

Hello, everybody! Thank you for all of your hard work this year!

I was with members of the youth division in Japan recently, along with Dean Lawrence Carter of the Martin Luther King Jr. International Chapel at Morehouse College in Atlanta. Before the trip, Dean Carter had been very excited about seeing SGI President Ikeda. He told us that 30 years ago, when a reporter asked Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. who is the greatest Christian in the 20th century, Dr. King responded, “Mahatma Gandhi.” Dean Carter said that if he were asked that same question today, he would reply without hesitation that the world’s greatest Christian is “A Buddhist—Daisaku Ikeda.”

He explained that he could say this because he feels that President Ikeda, through his actions, is doing the most to put the humane ideals of Christianity into practice.

While attending the Sept. 7 Headquarters Leaders Meeting, held at the Tokyo Makiguchi Memorial Hall, Dean Carter introduced a portrait of President and Mrs. Ikeda that is going to be unveiled next April at the Chapel. He also inducted President Ikeda into Morehouse College’s Martin Luther King Jr. International Collegium of Scholars. In the beginning of his speech, which he delivered at the meeting, Dean Carter mentioned how happy he was to meet with Dr. Ikeda, whom he now considers his spiritual mentor.

The next day, President Ikeda opened the Soka International Women’s Center, a most beautiful, palatial structure, and expressed his tremendous respect and appreciation for women at a dinner he hosted that evening for women’s division leaders. He told me: “Please convey my heartfelt regards to each and every one of your members. America is a land of friendship, so please continue to deepen and strengthen your mutual bonds of friendship. SGI-USA should not be tied to formality. Have the courage to be yourself. Be natural, be yourselves. If you base everything on daimoku, you will do well in all your endeavors. Now is the era of the ‘inverted pyramid.’ The top should support the base. In other words, leaders should serve the members.”

Through his encouragement, I learned all the more deeply how important it is for us as leaders to always think and care about the members. How many people can we visit and share our hearts with toward the upcoming Nov. 18 commemorative meetings? Let’s encourage others by sharing our hearts with them. Recently, President Ikeda presented all of us with the poem “Soar—Into the Vast Skies of Freedom! Into the New Century!” I know everyone is reading and studying this amazing poem. In it, he writes about his hopes and expectations for Soka University of America:

*Toward the civilization  
of the twenty-first century;  
for the sake of the young leaders and scholars;  
for the sake of the  
peace, prosperity and joy  
that come from humanistic education!*  
—Aug. 11 *World Tribune*, p. 8

President Ikeda has been saying that his final task is education. He is focusing all of his energies on America, centering on SUA. I know that many of our youth are hoping to

attend, and many others are supporting this institution through their prayers.

There is no doubt that this university is the treasure of the SGI-USA. Its success will grow out of the rich soil all of us have cultivated through our painstaking efforts.

So next month, in the SGI-USA, we will all have the opportunity to contribute to the SGI-USA Soka University Scholarship Fund, which will support the education of SUA students. This is one more way that each of us can support this wonderful institution and feel the pride of doing so.

As you know, this year is the 40th anniversary of our SGI movement in America — of President Ikeda's first visit to the United States. It also marks the 70th anniversary of the founding of the Soka Gakkai. It is therefore an opportunity to show our deep appreciation for the efforts of the three presidents, of our mothers and fathers, of our seniors in faith — for the pioneers who dedicated their lives to building our organization. Without them, we would not be here today.

So please, let's never forget our sincere appreciation for the pioneers. When we unite with the pioneers, we will create an unshakable, great organization.

This weekend, the members of the CEC together studied the Daishonin's writing "The Hero of the World." One passage reads: "Buddhism primarily concerns itself with victory or defeat, while secular authority is based on the principle of reward and punishment. For this reason, a Buddha is looked up to as the Hero of the World, while a king is called the one who rules at his will" (*The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, p. 835). President Ikeda stresses this point over and over again. Fundamentally, it means that life is a battle, and that we practice Buddhism to transform any negative situation in our lives into a positive one. Concretely, this means that whatever circumstances we face, we can show proof of growth and progress.

What determination have you made toward next year? I know many of you made personal goals at the beginning of this year. And as we approach the end of the year, I'm sure some of you forgot your determination, some of you have already accomplished your goals, and others are facing difficulties you never imagined. Remember, though, that Buddhism is about proving the validity of our practice through our own efforts. This means overcoming your difficulties and accomplishing your dreams.

At the same time, many of you set targets for propagation, publications promotion and meeting participation. I really want to thank you for the efforts and remarkable results you have shown thus far. At the same time, if you have not accomplished what you set out to, now is the moment to pray to the Gohonzon and determine to try one more time.

This weekend at the CEC, we reaffirmed our commitment to care for the members. The happiness of each member is the reason that our organization exists. The point of this quarter's goal of meeting participation is to enable each member to become happy. We are not chasing a number. Rather, we are determined to reach out to 100 percent of our membership based on our deep compassion and conviction.

Finally, there have been many concerns regarding the function of the zones and their role. We had discussions with the zone leaders, and we will clarify this further by the end of the year. In this way, we will begin the New Year fully prepared for great advancement.

Thank you very much!