

## KING DAY CELEBRATED NATIONWIDE

All over the country, SGI-USA members commemorated Jan. 15, Martin Luther King Jr. Day, by marching in parades, holding seminars and participating in local interfaith events.

In Dallas, despite rain, frigid temperatures and the threat of snow, more than 100 members participated for the fifth straight year in the Martin Luther King Jr. Day Parade. They joined more than 100 different groups to march four miles under the banner “Living the Dream.” This year, for the first time, the members constructed a float from which they sang “Singin’ in the Rain” and waved to the crowd.

SGI-USA member Audrey McClure, who organized the members’ participation along with her husband, David, said: “In the five years of participating in this parade, this is the most meaningful because of the beautiful unity the members have shown. No one has complained about the weather at all.”

The SGI-USA Culture Department in Washington, D.C., commemorated King Day at a new bookstore in downtown Washington. The combined presentation, dialogue and performance event, “Envisioning Cultures of Peace: Building Sustainable Communities,” drew more than 135 participants, about a quarter of whom had never attended an SGI event before.

“By engaging our colleagues in dialogue about peace on this significant day for peace movements,” Region Culture Department Director Kathleen Dockett stated, “we hoped to foster a sense that ‘the power of one’ person creates the change needed to bring about a peaceful world.”

The holiday gathering met in a public setting and also included Buddhist and non-Buddhist professionals on the main panel as well as in the audience. The result was an afternoon of stimulating dialogue, thought-provoking presentations, and joyful entertainment.

The program included a panel of youthful Culture Department members Witney Rose, Ariana Bock, Wen-Shing Ho, Savita Krishnamurthy and Steve Harvey, representing the professions of medicine, education, artistic work (film), law, and scholarly research (biotechnology), respectively. Each has transformed a harsh aspect of his or her work into a way to create unique value for their professions. For example, Steve Harvey works for the U.S. Army, but creates environmentally friendly ways to detoxify chemicals.

Together, SGI-USA members, colleagues and friends emerged from the relaxed, community setting in this new bookstore with expanded ideas about ways to create peace and with refreshed views of how each individual can contribute to that process.

Members in Long Beach, Calif., joined in the planning of their local Martin Luther King Interfaith Celebration, which was titled “Hope for the 21st Century.” More than 350 people attended the annual event at the Gospel Memorial Church of God in Christ, which included a keynote address from Rabbi Steven B. Jacobs, a highly respected civil rights activist, and performances from many community groups.

Cory Joseph, an SGI-USA young men’s division member, served as the event’s master of ceremonies. The SGI-USA’s Victory Over Violence exhibit was set up in the church lobby, and many attendees signed the VOV pledge.

In Fort Walton Beach, Fla., members built a float that was awarded first prize in their local King Day parade, which drew about 1,000 spectators. In addition, the *Northwest*

*Florida Daily News* ran a front-page photo of the SGI-USA Gulf Coast Area Korean Dance Troupe performing for the festivities.

Dayton, Ohio, members also marched in their community's parade, joining more than 3,000 others in celebrating Dr. King's legacy. Thirty-five members marched behind the banner "Soka Gakkai International — Buddhists for Peace, Education and Culture."

In Philadelphia, SGI-USA members helped support the Martin Luther King Jr. Association for Nonviolence's 19th annual benefit luncheon. The late Dr. King's eldest son, Martin Luther King III, gave the keynote speech. He mentioned to the local members his admiration of SGI President Ikeda and the Victory Over Violence project.

"I am so pleased that the participation of SGI-USA members in these events around the country has been increasing over the years," said Al Albergate, SGI-USA director of community relations. "Two things make this especially gratifying: First, the initiative is coming from the grass roots. And second, I believe this is a direct response by our members to the human rights issues embodied by Martin Luther King Jr."

*From reports by Troy Murrain, Vincent Hodge, Donna Hinton, Savita Krishnamurthy, Mark L. Jay, Frank Hatcher and Al Albergate.*