

TAKING OUR EFFORTS ONE STEP FURTHER BY MATILDA BUCK SGI-USA WOMEN'S LEADER

I *love* working for kosen-rufu. I can't imagine any better way to spend my life. I try to use my time as best I can, but there's a way to take my efforts one step further: through my financial contribution.

I am filled with appreciation when I think that, while I'm at home preparing dinner, my dollars are helping turn on the lights in the Oklahoma City Community Center. When I'm spending time with my grandchildren, a copy machine in the Louisville Community Center is working overtime. When I'm visiting a member—well, you get the idea.

Early in my practice, I learned that Buddhism means service to others. That is, in fact, the posture of Mahayana Buddhism. The first of the six paramitas—the practices required of bodhisattvas to attain enlightenment—is almsgiving, which includes the almsgiving of the Law (as in introducing others to this practice), the almsgiving of fearlessness (as in encouraging others) and material almsgiving. Nichiren Daishonin writes: “What is appropriate for ordinary people is offering in principle [sincerely offering what is important to one's own life]. This is the teaching called the paramita of almsgiving...” (*The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, p. 1126). This is our pledge: We make offerings for both the spiritual and the physical growth of our movement.

Once a year, in May, we are given an opportunity to crystallize our commitment to kosen-rufu by making a special contribution, and these contributions help to keep our organization running.

Did you know that in a typical month, we spend between \$400 and \$700 for utilities (gas, electricity, water) for each of our facilities? Multiply that by 69 community centers, two new activity centers and other facilities like the SGI Plaza in Santa Monica, Calif.

Here is a general breakdown of how our contributions are used:

- Asset acquisition (the purchase of buildings, properties and equipment, as well as building improvements)
- Operations (community center leases, insurance, maintenance, mailings, utilities, photocopy machines, telephones)
- Bookstore operations (purchasing, distribution costs and warehousing)
- Administrative (salaries, legal, accounting and administrative costs)
- Activities (for instance, renting space for the upcoming Youth Family Festivals)

Along with our own contribution, there's another aspect that is important: Enabling everyone to participate. We should not assume someone knows about this contribution activity. If you're too shy to encourage others to participate, then just tell them how good you feel about making a contribution yourself. After all, this is May 2001. This period has been a target of our organization for decades. That alone makes it historic, and so what an auspicious time to make a financial contribution to kosen-rufu.

I am overflowing with pride at what we have accomplished to this point and what we will embark upon from now. Three steps may provide a starting point for the May commemorative contribution activity:

1. Pray that the May 2001 commemorative contribution will be the most successful ever—that we can strengthen our financial foundation for the 21st century.
2. Make a personal goal to take our own commitment one step further in one aspect of our lives, whether financial or otherwise.

3. Help one other person to participate at this historic time.

Our organization exists only because of our contributions—our time, our effort, our care and, yes, our money. During his 1996 trip to the United States, President Ikeda said, “To do, create or contribute something that benefits others, society and ourselves, and to dedicate ourselves as long as we live to that challenge—that is a life of true satisfaction, a life of value” (*SGI President Daisaku Ikeda’s Addresses in the United States*, p. 78). This isn’t some giant entity out there accomplishing all this—it’s all of us.

May 2001 is a historic time, not only because it’s the beginning of a new century, but because we, each of us, can take all of our past efforts and our future dreams one step further.