

**OUR DISTRICT
MISSION DISTRICT, RIVERSIDE, CALIF.
GROWING WITH A SENSE OF MISSION
BY GINA JONES, RIVERSIDE, CALIF., CORRESPONDENT**

Mission District in Riverside, Calif., is growing. In the past year, the district has seen six new members receive the Gohonzon, with three more preparing for conferrals in the near future. And there is usually a guest or two at any given meeting in the district.

Steven Schiratis, a member who received the Gohonzon in April, says of Mission District: "It is absolutely great, a place of acceptance. I feel like the people there really take a stand for me. I have such a sense of hope after the meetings, and a sense of having contributed."

Formed in 1998, Mission District has continued to grow over the past three years, and is poised to split again this month into two new districts.

Hisako Duffy, the district women's leader, helped to pioneer the SGI-USA organization's growth from the 1960s until today. Recently, in a letter to SGI President Ikeda, she wrote, "As long as my body is moving, I am going to do my best." Her prayers for the district from the very beginning were clear and specific. She determined that the members would be happy and enjoy their practice. She also prayed for people to rise up and take responsibility for the success of the meetings. Her honesty and ability to communicate with others, coupled with her boundless energy, have resulted in member after member rising up with joy and growing in faith .

The district leaders, Ken O'Ferrall, Hisako Duffy, Michael Choi and Mitsuko Kinoshita, along with groups leaders Gina Jones and Naomi Warner, have worked hard to create a family atmosphere.

Vera Raica, who received the Gohonzon last year, says she has seen a huge improvement in her life recently due to coming to the weekly slow gongyo and study meetings at her group leader's house. Improving her gongyo was important, and studying together enhanced her understanding of Buddhism. "But," she says, "there is more. We bonded—everyone, with a sense of caring about each other and taking joy in each other's progress."