

**NEW YORK UNITES TO SUPPORT RELIEF EFFORTS
BY SEAN AND YUKO GROVER
NEW YORK CORRESPONDENTS**

What can I do to help?" This is the question that continues to echo throughout New York City. Everywhere you look, ordinary people are flooding the streets to volunteer and offer assistance. The destruction and loss of life caused by the World Trade Center tragedy has caused the bodhisattva spirit to emerge in its citizens. As SGI-USA Men's Leader Tariq Hasan commented: "Amidst all this hell, you can truly see what kosen-rufu is like. The feeling generated in the city since the attack represents the true beauty of humanity."

Immediately following the heartbreaking news of the World Trade Center collapse, youth division members gathered at the New York Culture Center and began organizing relief efforts, designating the center a drop-off point for canned food, fruit, water and clothing for rescue workers. The youth donated 2,000 T-shirts from the Northeastern Zone Family Youth Festival.

Northeastern Zone Young Men's Leader Ken Nakagawa noted: "The theme from the festival, 'Heroes of Life, Champions of Humanity,' is written on each T-shirt. It's amazingly fitting to think rescue workers are now wearing them. They truly are heroes."

Throughout the week, members delivered sandwiches, participated in blood drives, performed volunteer work at relief centers and provided medical attention to rescue workers and victims. Two members from New Jersey who are firefighters continue to work daily at "ground zero," where the buildings collapsed. And an American Red Cross Booth has been set up in the lobby of the culture center to collect donations.

At the city's major relief center, SGI-USA youth labored all week, from morning until night, delivering supplies and providing support. Kazu Toda, a region young men's leader who volunteered, reports: "I really felt people's positive energy. It was a total unified effort. Every single person displayed [his or her] Buddha nature."

Memorial gongyo for the victims of the attack was held at the New York Culture Center every evening beginning Sept. 11, set to continue through the following week. Hundreds of members have been gathering at the center to chant, talk and receive encouragement. After their sincere prayers, members have also been invited to share their feelings at open-mike sessions.

"We want to provide a forum for people to relieve their suffering and anguish by talking and connecting with human beings rather than just watching television," noted Mr. Hasan. "By expressing their feelings with fellow members, they can refresh their determination to move forward and use this great evil to awaken to their mission as Bodhi-sattvas of the Earth."

Additionally, the youth initiated weekly 10-hour daimoku sessions to support the rescue efforts and energize members' efforts for peace. Many members witnessed the attack, and more than 40 members escaped from the World Trade Center towers before they collapsed. All are struggling to overcome the horror they experienced. Many downtown members are not able to return to their homes due to the devastation of the area. For all members, the culture center remains a place to chant, heal, connect with friends and receive constant encouragement.

Youth division member Blane Charles, who witnessed the attack firsthand, noted, "I stopped everything I was doing, dried my tears and headed straight to the culture center to support." Misa Crystal, New Jersey Region young women's leader, spoke for many

members when she said: “When I first found out about the attack, I was very shocked. But the more I chanted daimoku, the more I was able to turn the feeling into determination.”

On Sept. 14, New York members came together for a candle -light vigil in front of the culture center, followed by gongyo, daimoku and dialogue. Heartfelt messages from various SGI organizations around the world were shared. A fellow member from Afghanistan was introduced to illustrate the importance of not blaming a particular culture for the evils of the world. He related that reaching out to embrace different people and cultures is what the SGI movement is all about.

“I think our resolve as Buddhists is going to be continually tested over the coming days, weeks and months,” noted men’s division member Bob Taliaferro. “In this crucial moment of deep and compelling crisis, let’s all chant, study and seek encouragement and support from one another. Let’s develop the kind of understanding — and take the kind of actions through our thoughts, words and deeds — that will qualify us as true followers of Nichiren Daishonin.”

Actions of support and encouragement certainly continue throughout the city. As Mr. Hasan stated a week after the tragedy: “I feel New York is a city of great resiliency, and its occupants have shown that. They’re fighting back with great spunk. The members are also visiting and encouraging each other, and are determined to stand up courageously for the sake of peace, even though their viewpoint may be in the minority. The members are not thinking revenge — they are thinking peace. I believe this point is very important for the rest of the country and the rest of the world to understand.”