

SGI-USA HOLDS MEMORIALS ACROSS AMERICA

Thousands of SGI-USA members and their friends and families gathered at community centers throughout the United States, Sept. 12–16, participating in memorial services for those lost in the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks.

On Sept. 15, nearly 2,000 people gathered at the SGI-USA Los Angeles Friendship Center to celebrate the life of David Seima Aoyama, who died when American Airlines Flight No. 11 crashed into the World Trade Center in New York. Messages of condolence poured in for the ceremony, including from both the men's and women's divisions of the Soka Gakkai in Japan.

In his own message to the memorial, SGI President Ikeda lauded Mr. Aoyama as “a young leader whom I trusted with my heart. As my disciple, as an SGI-USA staff member and as a genuine human being, David continued to work for American kosen-rufu, battling injustices and serving his fellow members.”

A powerfully moving eulogy was read by Mr. Aoyama's two children, Emily, 19, and George, 17. They expressed their deep appreciation for their father's care and dedication, and, despite their grief, determined to continue striving to exceed his expectations. “When you return, Dad,” added Emily, “let's create even more happy memories together.”

In his remarks, SGI-USA General Director Danny Nagashima touched on the healing power of the SGI family. “This week, millions of Buddhas around the world are sharing in our prayers for David and all those affected by this loss,” he said. “And while we must insure that those who committed this horrible act are brought to justice, we must also fulfill our mission as Bodhisattvas of the Earth to embrace all people and uphold the dignity of life. I know David would want us to continue our efforts to rid society of divisiveness based on race, religion or anything else.”

In Denver on Sept. 12, more than 500 people gathered for a memorial service at the Denver Culture Center. Among those assembled, a deep commitment to continue the SGI's work for peace was shared. Commenting on tendency of people to resort to violence to solve their problems, Deanna Grief, 13, said: “I do not want to live in a world of prejudice and bloodshed! I would much rather work for kosen-rufu and live in a world where we love and respect others.”

Young people gathered at the San Francisco Culture Center for prayer and dialogue on the causes of and solutions to violence, Sept. 16. After intense discussion, the groups shared their conclusions. “The important thing is how to use our practice of Buddhism and to share it with people in our environment,” reported one group. “We have to be strong enough to explain to people that even though this terrible thing occurred, through Buddhism we can create a greater future.”

A memorial for Mr. Aoyama was also held in Chicago, where he practiced in the 1980s. Many members shared memories of their deep friendship with him and expressed their determination to dedicate themselves to their SGI activities even more in his memory.

Almeda Bailey shared reminiscences of how when she and Mr. Aoyama were leaders together, “we would fight like brother and sister,” sometimes bickering but always with the same goal in mind. With raw grief and welling conviction, she concluded: “Violence is not the key! In David's name, I will dedicate my life to fighting against war!”

—*Leisa Mills, Dan Defensor and Ron Baird contributed to this article.*