

**MAKING SEPT. 11
A TURNING POINT IN WASHINGTON, D.C.
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SGI-USA General Director Danny Nagashima met with Washington, D.C., Region and Virginia-Carolina Region leaders and youth members Sept. 26 at the SGI-USA's Washington, D.C., Community Center. This was his first visit to the area following the terrorist attack on the Pentagon on Sept. 11. The thoughtful, yet animated, gathering combined fresh local reports, on-the-spot faith testimonials and words of encouragement in faith.

Following a memorial service and evening prayer, Lisa Graves, a young women's district leader and a lawyer with the federal government, passed along points from the first youth training course of the 21st century, held in Japan and ending on Sept. 11. The participants' return flight was rerouted to Vancouver, British Columbia. Explaining that the five-day layover, studying and having dialogues with other youth, deepened her commitment to peace, Ms. Graves articulated three key ideas gained on her trip: 1) Correct prayer is not to plead, ask or hope for peace, but to take concrete action for peace, in every aspect of one's life based on that prayer; 2) Every person is indispensable; the warm care by the Soka Gakkai members made her feel like a "rock star for peace"; all of us must value, appreciate and honor each other and each other's mission for peace; and 3) Peace is imperative.

Wen-Shing Ho and Alexis Gibson spoke of their initiating a dialogue in their apartment building, inviting residents and friends to an informal gathering which gave everyone attending the opportunity to express their thoughts, feelings, concerns and ideas in wake of the events of Sept. 11. A total of 20 people, from at least 10 different countries around the world, participated in this forum in one way or another. Many more offered their support behind-the-scenes. Wen-Shing and Alexis have scheduled a dialogue on SGI President Ikeda's book *For the Sake of Peace* at their local bookstore, and dream of holding such dialogues at all Washington, D.C., bookstores.

Reporting that the airplane crashed into Pentagon offices vacated only six weeks earlier, Diana Fleek, an SGI-USA member who works at the Pentagon, pointed out that although 25,000 people work there, the major impact of the plane struck the vacated portion of the building. After helping move people from the area that day, she sat down to chant for clarity and wisdom. As appreciation and compassion welled up within her for the many lives lost, she prayed to negate such deep evil.

At work the next day, she noticed that among the military leaders and politicians there was a trenchant determination to draw upon coalitions and cooperation, rather than brute force, in ridding the world of the "cancer" that could express itself in such outrageous acts. The following Monday, U.S. President George W. Bush visited the Pentagon for a briefing about the partial mobilization of military reserve forces and Diana, shaking his hand, said, "Mr. President, we're counting on you to dialogue first," to which he responded with a focused nod of acknowledgment.

In his speech, General Director Nagashima placed the events of Sept. 11 in historical context in relation to Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism. The Victory Over Violence campaign carried out throughout the SGI-USA over the previous two years has initiated dialogue at many levels of American society. Now, because of the tragic loss of friends,

Americans can talk about peace from their hearts. He reminded the gathering that since 1966, SGI President Ikeda has been calling the 21st century the Century of Life, and has suggested the importance of fostering people who perceive the interconnectedness of all life, who wisely embrace all cultures and extend their compassion to people in all places.

“Awakening to their destinies as Bodhisattvas of the Earth,” the general director said, “SGI-USA members can make the events of Sept. 11 a turning point for world peace. Now is the time to go back to the basics of Buddhism—faith, practice and study—so as to communicate to others the dignity of life, the Buddhist conviction that life is greater than any treasure in the universe.

Mr. Nagashima concluded by urging the participants to live as humanists based on the idea that the essence of all life and the universe is Nam-myoho-renge-kyo.

—*Diana Fleek, Alexis Gibson and Wen-Shing Ho contributed to this article.*