

A Story That Needs To Be Shared
By DAVE MCNEILL, Managing Editor
Santa Monica, Calif., May 8

The SGI-USA's diversity is becoming famous, and a professor of religion at the University of Hawaii wants to share our story. Dr. David W. Chappell, who knows the organization well through his friendship with SGI President Ikeda and members in Hawaii, will be writing a chapter about the SGI-USA in a new book about Buddhism in the West.

"The most segregated time in America, it is often said, is Sunday morning," Dr. Chappell says. "At that time people go to the church or temple of their choice to be with other people who share their values...and this usually means people of the same ethnic background."

But he says that unlike most religious groups, SGI-USA meetings are often ethnically diverse. "Since this blending of ethnic diversity into a harmonious religious group is a remarkable achievement that is little known and even less understood, and since this new religious expression provides a positive model within our ethnically divided world, it is a story that needs to be shared," he says.

The SGI-USA is fully cooperating with Dr. Chappell's research, setting up meetings with individual members and groups in eight cities in May, June and August. These interviews come on the heels of a recent survey by Phillip Hammond, a professor at the University of California at Santa Barbara, who is writing a book on the SGI-USA.

"Along with the book Dr. Hammond is working on, Dr. Chappell's research is another opportunity for the SGI-USA to be presented accurately to the public through the objective research of an established academic, who is not a member of our organization," Al Albergate, SGI-USA's community relations director says.

"I believe this will help win further acceptance and understanding of Buddhism, and I believe it will support our members in their efforts to teach Buddhism in this country," he says

Questions Dr. Chappell seeks to answer include: How does the SGI-USA develop a deep common ground in the midst of ethnic diversity? Has this happened everywhere in the SGI-USA? How does this achievement of diversity relate to the past image of the SGI-USA as aggressive and pressuring people into conformity? How do members understand this experience of diversity? Is ethnic diversity found not only among the membership, but also among those who are heading committees and are active in SGI-USA leadership?

"Answers to these and similar questions will provide a background for an exciting story that needs to be told," Dr. Chappell emphasizes.

"Because diversity is one of our greatest assets, it's exciting that a noted scholar such as Dr. Chappell will be studying this aspect more thoroughly," Carrie Rogers, SGI-USA public relations project manager, says. "I am looking forward to the results."

Engaged Buddhism in the West is being edited by Christopher S. Queen of Harvard University, who along with Sallie B. King of James Madison University edited the 1996 book *Engaged Buddhism*, which included a chapter on the Soka Gakkai in Japan.

WT