

Crossing the Racial Divide
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Compassion and healing emerged as the pervasive messages of a seminar titled “Dealing With Racial Diversity: The Challenge of Becoming a Global Citizen” held at the Denver Culture Center in April. Sponsored by the Culture Department, the seminar’s concept originated from the passion and commitment of the diverse group of members who planned the event. The emphasis throughout the planning process was on dialogue, developing respect for differing viewpoints and encompassing new perspectives.

The result was a forum and Q-and-A session with three speakers: Ed Guajardo Lucero, associate director of The Centers at the University of Colorado at Denver; William Wei, professor of history at the University of Colorado; and Vincent Harding, professor of theology and social transformation at the University of Denver.

Dr. Wei, who specializes in modern Chinese history, said he “received his socialization in the Lower East Side of Manhattan, where I ran with immigrant youth from Eastern Europe and the Caribbean.” Because of his youthful experiences, he said, he is one of the few Chinese Americans who can claim to have Chinese, Jewish and Puerto Rican values and attitudes, making him a product of multicultural America.

Dr. Wei asked, “How does one cultivate global citizenship?” He mentioned that SGI President Ikeda’s speech at Columbia University gave three important elements of global citizenship: wisdom, the courage not to fear difference, and the compassion to maintain an imaginative empathy.

He stressed the importance of the imagination for opening new possibilities, saying that hope springs from the ability to envision new realities. This is an important aspect of developing a more expansive, inclusive perspective and transcending differences — both necessary prerequisites for global citizenship, he said.

Dr. Harding, a leading scholar on the life and thought of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., said there is a growing tendency away from compassion in today’s world. In this regard, he expressed his admiration for the SGI-USA and President Ikeda. Although Dr. Harding comes from a Christian tradition, he recognized that compassion was a common, important element to both Christian and Buddhist traditions.

“We don’t need compassion if we don’t have anyone who is giving us a hard time,” Dr. Harding explained. In other words, compassion emerges from our struggle to combat selfishness and inhumanity. He reminded everyone to struggle positively against adverse situations, alluding to the profound resources found in Buddhist philosophy when he suggested that “great spiritual resources should be directed to great spiritual problems.” He went on to express his confidence in SGI-USA members to contribute in a significant way to the problems besetting America.

Dr. Harding then surprised everyone by saying that it is important for all revolutionaries to sing together. He led everyone in an old spiritual he had adapted for the occasion.

Opportunities abounded for informal dialogues throughout the seminar, which encouraged both participants and speakers. “Now I have hope for the future,” Dr. Wei said.

Maria Guajardo Lucero, Rocky Mountain Joint Territory Culture Department chairperson, closed the seminar by pointing out how important healing was in the process of overcoming racial divisiveness. She said that the word *healing* comes from the word *whole*, which in turn comes from the word *holy*. To heal the various racial divisions in the United States, a profound spiritual revolution is necessary, she said.

Who better to accept this responsibility than SGI-USA members?

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