

My First Victory As a Leader
By CHICO GARZA
San Francisco

I have been in my current district for 14 years, with the same district leader. In the early 1990s, our district went through many changes, including our women's division leader transferring out and our membership list gaining many, many inactive members. The small core of active members had to travel across town to go to district meetings. And the meetings were boring, without any youth. There was no unity.

Due to a lack of vision and goals for our district, my district chief and I had a great challenge ahead of us. One goal we set was to create a happy family environment, where we genuinely cared for one another. We also had to make our meetings less formal, more attractive.

One sad reality was that I was the only active young men's division member and none of my YMD members ever returned my phone calls. I had absolutely no rapport with any of them, and it hurt. This pain forced me to reflect on my position as newly appointed YMD district leader. In 1991, I wrote to SGI President Ikeda. His response instilled in me the passion to create a heart like his, to work hard for my district.

For the next six years my district chief and I worked hard to actualize our vision for our district. After cleaning up our membership list, we gradually visited every single YMD and men's division member.

One night at a bar, four years ago, a young man who recognized me from the old Daly City Community Center asked if I was an SGI member. I found out that he had the Gohonzon rolled up, that he used to be a chapter chief and had even been born into this practice. That night I went home and chanted for him to start practicing again. The next day I called him, visited him, and by the end of the week had encouraged him to re-enshrine the Gohonzon and participate in meetings again. I took many senior leaders to encourage him, I read the Gosho together with him, I composed poems for him and home visited him more than 100 times.

About a year later, his mother died of cancer and his sister of AIDS — within three months of each other. It was at this crucial moment that I saw him struggling with doubts about faith. He finally decided to move back with his family, who are all active members, near Los Angeles. This became his turning point — he broke through many internal obstacles. And this was my first victory as a leader in taking care of a member!

My greatest joy was to see him confident, happy and relying on the Gohonzon. President Ikeda recently said, "Limitless benefit and good fortune adorn those who cherish the members above all, who, rather than meeting the famous or powerful, would happily meet sincere members...." Words cannot express how my life has become healthier and happier through my efforts to chant for members' happiness and to visit them.

Last year, our district began to blossom. We attracted a diverse crowd that genuinely wanted to practice this Buddhism. In 1996 we had three new members receive the Gohonzon and three more have already joined this year. We now have six active youth and a new women's division leader and YWD leader. We have a new members/slow gongyo/study meeting every Tuesday night — and our meetings are no longer boring.

My district has changed so much!

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