

## VOICES: What is unique about practicing Buddhism in the Caribbean?

*Members from the Caribbean Territory respond:*

The important point for us right now is to get Caribbean unity. If we advance in our practice, the rest of the Caribbean islands will also. We want the Caribbean to advance politically, economically and in every other way.

— OSVALDO REYES, Puerto Rico

Because there is no single person who is very knowledgeable about Buddhism, we have to depend on intimate dialogue and thorough discussion to grow. But because of that, we grow together.

— WENDALL HARDING, Barbados

There are lots of different religions being practiced in Antigua. Also, there is mysticism. Lots of these influences tend to get into the practice of Buddhism, so we have to work at keeping our practice correct. Our biggest challenge is relating to one another because we have people from all over the world. So we are learning to build harmonious relationships together.

— PAOLO CALZOLARI, Antigua

We in the Caribbean had to struggle on our own for so long. We didn't have seniors in faith to go to. While studying abroad, I learned gongyo one page at a time and then taught it to my sister in St. Maarten over the phone. From that beginning in 1984, we now have more than 100 households with the Gohonzon.

— DAPHNE ILLIS, St. Maarten

The members in St. Maarten are very strong and have a lot of confidence and courage in their Buddhist practice. The guidance we get from reading the *World Tribune* and the various SGI materials allows us a direct dialogue with SGI President Ikeda and other members in general — it's like sitting down with the person who is writing the guidance or experience and having a long talk with them personally. This serves as our "senior leaders" in many ways. So we naturally encourage each other and the people we meet to subscribe to and read the publications. The publications really keep us going.

It is becoming less and less hard to practice as more and more people on our jobs and in our neighborhoods are becoming aware of Buddhism. The first step we take is to tell them about it. Based on their reaction, we know how to proceed — whether to explain more, or just let our lives and experiences speak for themselves. Most of our members come from Catholic or Methodist backgrounds, yet most of their immediate and extended families fully support them in their practice, even if they don't join the SGI themselves.

— ELROY HUGHES, St. Maarten

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