

**PERSPECTIVE: One Person, One Mile, One Smile at a Time**  
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**Kalamazoo, Mich.**

*I would do more, if only....* Sound familiar? How many times have we found ourselves facing a challenge that stands in the way of our working for kosen-rufu or doing something to help someone?

Because of my new teaching position, last December, my husband, Glenn, and I moved from Los Angeles to the small midwestern city of Kalamazoo, Mich. We left a huge metropolis with many community centers and the World Culture Center and went to one where the Chicago Culture Center and Detroit Community Center are each two-and-a-half hours away.

To the north of us, even after geo reo (geographic reorganization of the SGI-USA), members in Michigan's northern peninsula still have to drive into Wisconsin for large meetings. By the time the wind chill dipped below freezing in Kalamazoo and it got dark at 4:00 p.m., I knew that I was going to have to get my pioneer spirit back in gear.

It was then that I remembered getting together last fall with longtime friend and fellow member Kathy Grant, who practices in North Carolina. Kathy told stories of hitting the highway several times every week to visit members and do activities.

In Michigan, I talked with headquarters leaders Lyn and Bernie Sawicki. Lyn, who has logged countless miles visiting members in this heartland state despite a job that requires her to work very long hours, e-mailed this message to me: "The two most important things, I think, besides chanting, are to study and to connect with fellow members. Also, if we are to accomplish something great in Michigan, it will be because we have people exerting their unique capabilities while springing from one mind of faith."

That got me to thinking: Each one of us has our own geo reo to contend with, be it with distance, time or maybe just plain attitude ("Why should I have to do that home visit, anyway? And with her?"). Sometimes the issue is one of fatigue or fear.

Another of my new role models is Gwen Preston, Kalamazoo/Battle Creek District women's division leader (who lives two cities over, a 40-minute drive, by the way). Even though these two towns have more churches on every corner than filling stations, several years ago she made a determination to tell 100 people about Nam-myoho-renge-kyo. "I constantly have to battle my tendency to be fearful," she recently observed. But she decided to propagate this Buddhism anyway.

Speaking of fear, recently the Ku Klux Klan managed to hold a small white supremacist rally near city hall in downtown Kalamazoo. After the event, as Glenn and I watched a sneering youth who'd had too much to drink, I muttered to myself: "Oh, boy. Would I have the nerve to introduce him to Buddhism?"

But, in a way, that's just what our intrepid district leader, Dale Anderson, did. As soon as he found out the rally was to take place, Dale wrote an eloquent letter to the city newspaper about human understanding, which was published. Dale is also the man who told me, after a hard day's work with his lawn-care business one sweltering summer evening, "I'll pick anybody up, anywhere, who wants to go to a meeting."

So there you have it: one small Michigan city that's a microcosm of all the challenges Bodhisattvas of the Earth have to face.

And what are yours? What do each of us confront in our sincere efforts to make one more cause for world peace, for peace in the workplace, school or our homes?

As SGI President Ikeda said once: "In the organization, on the job and in human relations, it is only natural that we'll experience worries and deadlocks from time to time.

But it is precisely at such times that we must break through. There is no alternative other than to advance and realize victory through our efforts.”

This article is dedicated to Cheryl, who took the Entrance Examination despite her all-night job and double shifts; to Connie, who makes it to meetings, even with four kids; to Mary, who encouraged others even when she didn’t have a home phone; to Laurie, who hates to drive in the snow but does it anyway; to our other Dale, who has to work many evenings as a musician but manages to get to activities on the weekends; to Young Park, his wife; to Glenn, who must study late into the night; to Kim, who comes out when she can; and to Kathy, who is always cheerful and patient, no matter how late I call.

You are all kosen-rufu.

We can make a difference — one person, one mile, one smile at a time.

(To *World Tribune* readers: Please feel free to fill in the names of your fellow pioneers. And don’t forget to add your own name. I salute you all.)

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