

MAINTAINING OUR MOMENTUM FROM GENERAL DIRECTOR ZAITSU

Dear World Tribune reader,

I want to express my heartfelt appreciation for your untiring dedication and support of American kosen-rufu. We have arrived at the mid-point of 1999, the last year of the 1900s.

This year, we have begun a system of quarterly focus points: Propagation, Contribution, Publications and Discussion Meeting Participation. Of course, these focus points should not be reason to forget about other important features of our ongoing movement. Rather, based on a consistent foundation of faith, practice and study, we can use these quarterly points to collectively focus our attention while continuing to maintain momentum for all aspects of our kosen-rufu movement. The first two quarters, focusing on propagation and contribution, have already passed with remarkable progress and success. My appreciation for your efforts is beyond description.

What do we study for? According to Tsunesaburo Makiguchi, our founding president, it is the interconnected and advancing cycle of faith, practice and study that is prompted by one's self-motivation to study. Study provides a deeper understanding, which inspires one's faith leading to renewed action or practice, which, in turn, requires more understanding and so forth. This process is what is meant by the expression, "turning the wheel of Buddhist practice leading to enlightenment."

If we study only for study sake, however, then it is not Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism. The Daishonin said, "The daimoku that Nichiren now chants in the Latter Day of the Law is different from that of previous times; it is Nam-myohorenge-kyo for both oneself and others" (*Gosho Zenshu*, p. 1022). Our practice for others means praying for others' happiness. The results of such a prayer can be expressed in many ways; sharing an experience at a discussion meeting or visiting a friend or fellow member to encourage them, for example. But the primary meaning of praying for others' happiness is shakubuku or propagation. I believe we all know this, but Nichiren Daishonin says that true understanding is expressed through one's actions. "Without practice and study, there can be no Buddhism" (*The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, vol. 1, p. 95). Action, based on study, is central to the Daishonin's Buddhism.

The Central Executive Committee last year determined that two new members per district during this year was a reasonable estimation of what could be accomplished on average by each district throughout the nation. In conversations with people during my travels around SGI-USA, I've come to understand that this information is not widely known or understood. Certainly, dialogue within each district should be the means by which they create their own goals. In this regard, two new members per district should not be considered a goal imposed from above, but rather a stimulation for the districts to discuss how to implement their own propagation effort and what goals are appropriate for them.

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Many districts have guests at their meetings. This great desire to introduce the SGI to others has resulted in more than 8,000 guests at the women's general meetings in February and at the youth division March 16 meetings. Authentic care expressed through compassionate action is what will transform guests into members who embrace the Gohonzon. Sincere prayer for our friends and guests to overcome their problems and negative karma prompts dialogue. This dialogue can provide the opportunity to propose, "Let's chant together!" or "Let's read the Goshō to find the answer to that problem." In contrast, passively waiting for our friends to learn about Buddhism and the SGI through their self-motivated questions is not an expression of care. Rather, our courageous initiative to introduce guests to the practice allows them to enter more deeply into the Daishonin's world.

I encountered one district that consistently uses a guest book at the discussion meetings for all newcomers to register their visit. I believe this is a common practice in society. The members of that district then chant about each of these guests and from time to time will call them to see how they are doing and invite them to future activities. Compassion expressed in this kind of action for the sake of another person's happiness is what touches their hearts and is the key to deepening everyone's understanding of the Daishonin's Buddhism. We really chant daimoku for our guests to chant daimoku to become happy. Wisdom about what action is best will result from this kind of prayer.

Now is the time to complete the foundation for the Century of Life in the coming era. How can that be accomplished? I believe it is a solid organizational foundation of districts empowered with a firm grasp of this important point, who are joyfully challenging the goal for propagation that they have set. Districts that proceed without a sense of pressure or obligation toward their goal with a never-give-up commitment will reap boundless benefit and achieve victory for their members and society.

The remaining focus points for the last half of this year are publications and discussion meeting participation. In reality, these are another name for propagation. Without the shakubuku spirit, promoting our publications or inviting members and guests to discussion meetings is rootless. President Ikeda says that leaders should always consider how to advance kosen-rufu. The means for this is making the propagation effort to promote the *World Tribune* and *Living Buddhism* and increase our discussion meeting attendance. It may sound dry and business-like in print, but the drama of growth and benefit that unfold within each life that engages in this pursuit is greater and more meaningful than the best Hollywood can produce! The key is basing everything on serving our members and our friends.

Fred M. Zaitso, SGI-USA General Director