

SOUTHWEST DISTRICT — OVERLAND PARK, KANS.

Whether you attend a chanting session, youth division or a district discussion meeting in Southwest District, located in Overland Park, Kans., you will feel spiritually refreshed and a member of SGI-USA's family. Following the geographic reorganization in the Kansas City Area several years ago, a new district was formed with members coming together from different districts and locations in the Kansas City metropolitan area. Initially, no one really knew each other, and the struggle was to get to know each other and to respect each other individually. The determination of the district leaders, Melissa and Gary Fisher, was to make Southwest District the "people's district" and they set their goal to create a family atmosphere during activities.

Melissa shared that as members we have all had different experiences in SGI-USA and we have brought our successes as "positives" and our failures as "lessons learned" to the district. Based upon SGI President Ikeda's 1990 and recent guidance, as leaders, we do not adhere to an authoritarian leadership style. Our vision for the future is to have leaders and members become closer as friends; to have members take responsibility for activities in their own unique way; and for each member to see the benefits of practicing with each other.

The diversity in our district is very broad with parents, professional and blue collar workers, students, single and married individuals, and kids! Inclusion — not exclusion — because of age, gender, race or lifestyle differences is how we grow together as a district.

We have open dialogue sessions with members deciding how the district should operate; members are encouraged to ask questions and to find creative ways for carrying out activities; and themes of the district meetings are decided by the needs of the members, not by the leaders. Members are involved in taking responsibility for district activities on a volunteer basis.

Southwest District member Linda Simmons said that the leaders and members wanted to open their lives and hearts to each other in a sincere way and this has made a big difference in how people get along. The basis for creating unity in the district was chanting sessions at group and district levels. When members experienced problems in their daily life, everyone chanted for each others' happiness. Our compassion for each other helped to create a family atmosphere that has brought people together.

— *CHERYL UTLEY*