

**HIGHLIGHTS OF SPEECHES GIVEN AT THE YEAR-END REGION LEADERS  
MEETING, DEC. 5  
SUPPORT ONE ANOTHER WITH OUR HEARTS**

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For the last seven years, Fred Zaitso has dedicated himself to kosen-rufu and SGI-USA as its general director. Along with him, women's leader Wendy Clark endured many hardships over the last six years and worked really hard for kosen-rufu. Now we have a new general director, Danny Nagashima, and a new women's leader, Matilda Buck. I have witnessed the birth of this new leadership with my own eyes and will remember this auspicious occasion for the rest of my life.

Mrs. Buck became a member in 1972. Over these 28 years, she has encountered countless challenges and overcome many hardships to really develop into the person she is today. Most significantly, Matilda Buck is close to President Ikeda's heart. He is always speaking about her. She and her husband have both endured many hardships and obstacles. She appears very calm and composed, but she is a person of great passion. I feel her calm, polite and courteous demeanor is a perfect complement for Mr. Nagashima's vigorous nature! (Laughter). I am sure you will be inspired by them and agree that this is the ideal "first couple" for SGI-USA. All of us are on our way to enlightenment. We're all still in the process of human revolution and are not perfect yet. Please understand that they are not perfect either, and support them with all of your hearts.

Earlier, Mr. Wada proposed that you all get involved with a district. It's not just a matter of going to the district. As a matter of fact, when I returned to Tokyo I was assigned to Adachi Ward in Tokyo, which has 500 districts, but I put my utmost effort into helping the district that was suffering the most.

For three months, I was responsible for that which is located in an area where there are many apartment houses. This district was suffering because no new people were joining their district. All other districts were really joyful because they had at least one new person join.

Most of all, what I did was hold dialogues in this district through home visits, trying to really find out why they were suffering so much. I encouraged members by studying Nichiren Daishonin's writings with them or doing gongyo to try to help them overcome their problems. Of course they were talking to many people about Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism, but no one was getting to the point of receiving Gohonzon.

I agonized, myself. I determined to introduce one person to this district. So I was able to introduce a person in an apartment complex. You cannot imagine how joyful the district leader and the women's division district leader were. They were jumping up with joy! When I was here in America, I was still concerned about the situation so I called and heard that they had shared this practice with four more individuals after I left. The district now has five new members.

When we want to really develop the district, our challenge is: How can we help the district members overcome their sufferings and problems? Some members have connections to the temple members and somehow they can lose vigor and focus. While in America, I attended a chapter leaders meeting. There I heard of a district where some members were unsure or wavering in their practice, so I attended this district's discussion meeting. I sincerely chanted to the Gohonzon before I went to this meeting.

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There was one woman at the meeting who worked with a person who is a temple member. Every day she has been hearing things from this member. She attended this meeting determined that she was going to give up her position as a group leader in the SGI-USA and sever her ties with the organization. But through our dialogue, she finally opened up her eyes and said, “Yes, I understand. From today, I will really dedicate myself to activities in the SGI.”

So Nikken is not something far away. Within our own lives, the Buddha and the devilish function reside side by side. When our lives become weak, we will be done in by the devilish function. President Ikeda has often said that obstacles and devils do not come and knock on the door and announce their presence. They sneak in without a sound. When we have ill feelings toward our fellow members or other people — when we have problems — that’s when obstacles sneak into our lives.

The other day, President Ikeda shared this guidance with us: “The fact that as a human being we have a problem and we endure hardship is proof that we are alive and that we are really human. Earthly desires are enlightenment. It is when we have problems that we can do human revolution and change our karma.”

In closing, I want to express again how happy I am to be here today on this great occasion together with all of you. I renew my determination that from today on I will keep working hard to welcome President Ikeda back to America with all of you. Together we will force out the evil from our lives and we will force Nikken out from our lives. Thank you very much.