

**40TH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATIONS BASED ON THE THEME OF
CHAMPIONING HUMAN RIGHTS
BY SANDY WOLFE, CHICAGO**

Since our peace work is rooted in our respective communities, a greater emphasis is being placed on the local areas' anniversary activities. Most Central Zone districts held discussion meetings based on human rights-related topics at their neighborhood meetings during the month of September. Discussion meeting participants came away from these dialogues with a heightened awareness of the positive impact their daily practice and behavior have on their family, neighborhood, country and world.

This theme was carried through to the World Peace Prayer Meetings and other events in October. For example, Indiana Area hosted a world peace festival, Southern Ohio Area sponsored an open house, and Michigan/Detroit Areas sponsored a weeklong series of activities highlighted by the Victory Over Violence Concert at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor. Meanwhile, Kentucky Area hosted the Faith Enrichment Program, inviting human rights activists within the local community. Furthermore, in November, Northern Ohio Area will take part in a community event to prevent violence, while Wisconsin Area will hold a VOV exhibit at the Milwaukee County Court House for a week. All of these events are drawing hundreds of guests and giving members a unique opportunity to express their limitless creativity and create further ties to their communities.

The victories achieved through these exciting local events will build momentum toward the culminating Nov. 4 zone celebration in Chicago, which will be a most exuberant gathering of diverse people. Through music, dance, spoken word performance and multimedia presentations, the contributions of President Ikeda and of SGI-USA members to human rights movements over the past 40 years will be expressed. Our hope is that the audience will come away with a greater understanding of SGI-USA's rightful place in the global struggle for justice and equality.

We are also happy to announce that "Dialogue With Nature," the traveling exhibition of President Ikeda's nature photography, will be available for viewing before and after the zone event at the Chicago Culture Center.

Based on the power of prayer and our mentor's dream for worldwide kosen-rufu, the Central Zone is determined to develop the next generation of Midwest peace workers. Our "Championing Human Rights" event will become another benchmark, similar in significance to 1960 and 1980, in the growth and development of the Central Zone SGI-USA members.

Timeline

1960: Based on the power of prayer and his mentor's dream of worldwide kosen-rufu, a young Soka Gakkai President Ikeda meets with Midwest SGI-USA members in Chicago. These pioneering men and women have been sinking roots deep in the central United States ever since.

1980: Chicago members unite and thoroughly prepare to welcome SGI President Ikeda back to the windy city, commemorating the 20th anniversary of his initial visit.

SGI President Ikeda arrives in Chicago in October and attends the dramatically moving and heartwarming culture festival, “Capture the Spirit,” held in the Medinah Temple.

2000: On Saturday, Nov. 4, in Chicago’s 4,300-seat Arie Crown Theater, Central Zone members and their family, friends and colleagues will gather to celebrate the 40th anniversary of SGI-USA’s achievements in conducting grassroots peace work throughout the world. “Championing Human Rights” expresses our decades-long dedication, as a Buddhist association and as individuals, to eradicating human suffering based on the practice and teachings of Nichiren Daishonin’s Buddhism.