

**EACH PERSON IS PRECIOUS
BY DANNY NAGASHIMA
SGI-USA GENERAL DIRECTOR**

This Central Executive Conference was a new departure for the SGI-USA, with the appointment of our new youth leaders and the attendance of SGI Women's Leader Yumiko Hachiya and SGI North American Bureau Chief Norimasa Saito. On top of that, from Singapore and Malaysia—wherever he was—SGI President Ikeda sent us continuous messages of encouragement.

It has been one year since I was appointed general director. Together with Matilda Buck, Tariq Hasan, our courageous youth leaders and all of you, we have created a tremendous victory in the year 2000. From the bottom of my heart, thank you for all of your effort.

Upon my appointment, I determined to visit 1,000 SGI-USA members within one year. I want to report to you that just last week, while I was in Hawaii, I accomplished my goal. Across the nation, you are the ones who did all the work organizing my visits. Thank you very much!

Through these 1,000 encounters, I received a tremendous education. Day after day, I learned from all of you what life is about. I saw 1,000 dramas, each greater than a Broadway show or any movie. I would like to share with you the story of my 1,000th visit.

While in Hawaii, I met with Kazuko Takayama, who left Japan for the island of Kauai in 1965. At that time, President Ikeda told her, "If you don't have a mission in Kauai, you will come back to Japan in two or three years." She didn't understand at the time what he meant.

Back then, Kauai was very isolated and undeveloped, like a remote village. She was so lonely and homesick, not knowing anyone. She chanted to understand President Ikeda's guidance to find her mission, and she began to speak with people one by one about this Buddhism, creating her own kosen-rufu movement in Kauai.

At the opening of SGI-USA's first activity center in Kauai last week, every speaker at the opening spoke of Mrs. Takayama, calling her the mother of the island. I could clearly see the fulfillment of her mission—creating a beautiful SGI family on the island.

I asked her if she felt lonely and if she might be more comfortable living with her very successful son in Honolulu. She said: "No way! Even if I am alone here, I have my family in the SGI!"

From all of my visits, I learned five key things:

- 1) The heroes of kosen-rufu are the members.
- 2) We must always deepen our conviction in the Gohonzon. When we chant, nothing is impossible.
- 3) When we strive to understand President Ikeda's guidance, we will naturally practice Buddhism exactly as Nichiren Daishonin intended.
- 4) The SGI family is precious and beautiful.
- 5) Each member is invaluable.

President Ikeda has said: "A mighty tree is held upright by its roots. If the roots are strong and continue growing, the tree will grow too, and produce flourishing, green leaves. But if the roots rot and die, even the greatest tree will fall. The great tree is the SGI. The individual roots are each of you, protecting our frontline organization. You cannot see the

roots buried deep in the earth. In the same way, your daily SGI activities may seem modest, but it is precisely those practical, down-to-earth efforts that constitute the lifeline of kosen-rufu and become the driving force for your personal growth and development.”

Next year we are going to have many exciting cultural and peace activities. But our real SGI identity is found in our care toward just one individual. This is what it means to awaken to our mission as a Bodhisattva of the Earth.

Please remember that everything is contained in your efforts to challenge your own growth. Let’s make our goals toward next year a little bit more than this year. Let’s continue to develop with the conviction that all our efforts to make sure that every member is happy and full of appreciation will become the best cause to welcome President Ikeda and Mrs. Ikeda back to the United States.

As the general director, I pledge to do my best with all of you to make the coming year truly historic. Please have a safe holiday season and happy new year!