

**TRAILBLAZERS!**  
**BY KEIKO ISHII**  
**SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA ZONE STUDENT DIVISION LEADER**

I was recently appointed the Southern California Zone Student Division leader. I hesitated to accept the opportunity because of my lack of confidence. Despite the wonderful support and encouragement my leaders offered me, I found myself recoiling. As I chanted about this matter, I recalled the amazing experience of a women's division member that would help me make the decision to accept this responsibility.

This woman was very poor and had three children, all of whom were disabled. Despite her struggles, she devoted her life to establish the foundation of the Soka Gakkai. She had no desire for status or praise. She fought day and night for kosen-rufu in order to reply to her mentor, SGI President Ikeda. People insulted her and called her a religious fanatic, but she never slackened in her resolve.

When I first read her experience, my heart was deeply moved by her sincerity, her seeking spirit and her selfless devotion to kosen-rufu. I felt immense appreciation for her experience and I chanted sincerely to become a person who can protect the members who devote their lives to kosen-rufu. I determined that I would dedicate my life for the sake of the Law.

Although three years have passed since I first heard this experience, the memory of it constantly encourages me. Her story inspires me to expand my capacity to serve the members of the SGI. After deep reflection, I determined to accept the position and fully exert myself to learn from everyone and every opportunity. My hope is to grow with other student division members and become a capable individual who will be able to protect the members of the SGI.

How do I plan to realize these determinations? First, I will visit 150 student division members in Southern California this summer. I want to establish friendships with each student based on faith. Second, I will introduce one person to Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism by the end of this year. Third, I will deepen my faith and engrave a better understanding of the mentor-disciple relationship based on these activities.

In his speech on May 21, SGI President Ikeda said: "The soul of the student division is initiative. The future lies in the student division" (June 15 *World Tribune*, p. 4). If that is so, I want to be the one who will take the initiative to reach out to student division members. He goes on to say, "We need to foster capable individuals—capable leaders, in particular, in order to protect the people from the corrupt, cruel nature of authority" (June 15 *World Tribune*, p. 4).

Colleges and universities provide great educational opportunities, but where can we have opportunities to train and deepen our faith? The answer lies in SGI activities such as the Student Division Conference to be held at the Florida Nature and Culture Center from August 2–5. This FNCC conference will give us a chance to deepen our faith, develop our character and become even more capable individuals. Many students who went to this conference last year have established strong ties with new students from all over the nation and have empowered themselves to become the core of the student division in their respective areas.

I know that some of us have financial problems, some may have schedule conflicts

and some of us just hesitate to immerse ourselves in a new environment. But I really don't want anyone, including myself, to miss this opportunity. Let's challenge ourselves to participate so that we can develop together, grow together and create a wave of fortune together.

Let's go back to the Gohonzon and start with deep prayers while always reminding ourselves of the Daishonin's words: "Spur yourself to muster the power of faith.... Employ the strategy of the Lotus Sutra before any other" (*The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, p. 1001).