Books Published

Books by SGI President Ikeda:
Living the Gosho
The New Human Revolution, vol. 25

Children’s Books:
Greatest Treasure activity book
Victory All the Way activity book
Becoming a Dragon
The Deer King
The King Who Saved the Dove
The Turtle and the Warrior

Other Books:
Waking the Buddha

2014 Growth

Founded in 1960, the Soka Gakkai International-USA (SGI-USA) is the most diverse Buddhist community in the United States with more than 500 chapters and some 100 centers throughout the country. The SGI-USA is part of the larger SGI network with more than 12 million members in 192 countries and territories around the world. As lay believers and engaged Buddhists, SGI-USA members promote individual happiness and world peace through the practical application of the humanistic principles of Nichiren Buddhism. SGI-USA Buddhists worldwide strive to improve their lives and their communities by creating value and contributing to the well-being of others.

In 2014, the SGI-USA continued to focus on the importance of the neighborhood discussion meeting where people from all walks of life come together to convey the joys of their practice and share this practice with family and friends. By the end of 2014, the SGI-USA had 2,812 districts and 551 chapters.

SGI-USA Buddhist Centers Opened

There are about 100 Buddhist centers throughout the United States and its territories (see the back cover for a complete list). The following centers had openings in 2014:

- February Miami, Fla.
- March Hyattsville, Md.
- April Atlanta, Ga.
- May Dallas, Tex.
- Laguna Hills, Calif.
- August Tacoma, Wash.

Social Media

- Website: New site launched at www.sgi-usa.org
- Facebook: Find us (and like us) at www.facebook.com/sgiusa.info
- Bookstore: Shop online at http://bookstore.sgi-usa.org
- YouTube: Search the “SGI-USA Channel” for several videos, especially the series “Buddhist in America,” a documentary series that features youth applying Buddhism to their daily lives, and “Composing Hope,” which profiles youth who discuss how their Buddhist practice has informed their work as artists, at www.youtube.com/SGIUSAmedia
- Twitter: Find us at #OfficialSGIUSA
- Victory Over Violence revamped (the SGI-USA youth-led program aimed at building a culture of peace): Go to www.vov.com
- Create Magazine (the SGI-USA youth-led online magazine): Go to www.createmag.org
For more than five decades, based on the humanistic teachings of Nichiren Buddhism, the SGI-USA organization actively promotes peace, culture and education based on a belief in positive human potential and respect for the dignity of life. Most significant are the efforts of individual SGI-USA members in their own families, societies and workplaces, where they aim to promote high ideals, help resolve conflict and support the development of capable people. SGI-USA groups are active in public education and have developed large-scale international public exhibitions with a focus on peace and disarmament, human rights and sustainable development, as well as participating in interfaith activities and cultural exchanges.

The SGI continues to be led by its founding president, Daisaku Ikeda. The significance of his leadership as a Buddhist philosopher can most readily be gauged in the dramatic growth of the Soka Gakkai International organization and in the broad diversity that characterizes its movement for promoting a philosophy of character development and social engagement for peace. Indeed, the SGI is perhaps the largest, fastest-growing and most diverse association of lay Buddhists in the world today.

In 2014, the Year of Opening a New Era of Worldwide Kosen-rufu, we of the SGI, while warmly encouraging and supporting one another in faith, reached out to one person after another to help them realize such a life of triumph filled with hope and joy. This is the heart of our great movement for kosen-rufu, the flourishing of society and the happiness of humanity. SGI-USA members engage in small group discussion meetings that brim with dialogue, openness, equality, philosophy and hope in almost 3,000 homes and Buddhist centers across the United States.

More than anywhere, Mr. Ikeda’s philosophy has been embodied in his own actions: An impassioned advocate of dialogue for peace, as a means to bridge cultural divides and seek solutions to global issues facing humanity, he has pursued dialogue with a wide range of individuals around the world in the fields of education, culture, politics, the sciences and the arts. Mr. Ikeda has met and engaged in dialogue with leading thinkers including economist J. K. Galbraith, peace activist Joseph Rotblat, environmentalist Wangari Maathai, champion of human rights Adolfo Pérez Esquivel and Indonesian Muslim leader Abdurrahman Wahid.

Mr. Ikeda has published numerous books and proposals totaling more than 100 works and founded various peace-related institutions such as the Ikeda Center for Peace, Learning, and Dialogue, the Toda Institute for Global Peace and Policy Research, and the Institute of Oriental Philosophy. He has also founded the Min-On Concert Association and the Tokyo Fuji Art Museum to promote mutual understanding and friendship between different national cultures through the arts.

In a united call to action toward the abolition of nuclear weapons in Washington, D.C., in April, SGI-USA Women’s Leader Akemi Bailey-Haynie spoke at the SGI-sponsored interfaith symposium on the humanitarian impact of nuclear weapons. Representatives from diverse faiths, including Buddhist, Christian, Jewish and Muslim traditions, came together with disarmament policy experts to renew their commitment for a world free of nuclear weapons. Marking the 15th anniversary of the tragic shooting at Columbine High School in Littleton, Colo., the school collaborated with SGI-USA local members to open the Friendship Garden on the school campus. The SGI-USA donated cherry trees for the garden as an expression of their shared commitment to peace and nonviolence.

The SGI-USA’s Culture of Peace Distinguished Speaker Series also continued to support community initiatives for peace, culture and education, and engaged scholars and peace activists in non-sectarian, public dialogues on topics such as how to establish peace incentives to overcome racial divide, the importance of interfaith dialogue and the role of women in building peace. Speakers included Dr. Tad Daley, director of the Abolishing War program at the New York-based Center for War/Peace Studies; civil rights pioneer Vincent Harding; along with Dr. Betty Reardon, a founding figure in the field of peace education; Ambassador Anwarul Chowdhury, who pioneered the U.N. initiative on the Culture of Peace, and Dr. Olivier Urbain, director of the Toda Institute for Global Peace and Policy Research.

The following pages highlight some of the many ways in which SGI-USA Buddhists improve their daily lives and make a difference in their communities. If you are interested in additional information about the SGI-USA’s movement for peace, culture and education, we welcome your inquiries.
Exhibitions Hosted by the SGI-USA

**Artists as Peacemakers** • Jun. 15–Jul. 22, Atlanta, Ga. • Oct. 5, World Peace Day Concert, Santa Monica, Calif. • Nov. 3–8, Muhlenberg College, Allentown, Penn.

**Building a Culture of Peace for the Children of the World** • Jan. 20–24, Colorado College, Colorado Springs, Colo. • Jan. 21–24, Student Union and Library, Purdue University Calumet, Hammond, Ind. • Feb. 20–Mar. 1, Cape Cod Community College, Cape Cod, Mass. • Oct. 2–31, Peninsula Shopping Center, Rolling Hills Estates, Calif. • Oct. 14–Nov. 15, University of Missouri Kansas City Miller Nichols Library, Kansas City, Mo. • Dec. 4, University of Maryland, College Park, Md.


**Children Are the Future** • Sept. 19–21, Arts in the Heart of Augusta, Augusta, Ga.

**SGI-USA: An Engaged Buddhist Community** • Jun. 15–Jul. 22, Atlanta, Ga. • Sept. 20, Hyattsville, Md. • Sept. 27, Burtonsville Day Parade, Burtonsville, Md. • Sept 27, Irvine Global Village Festival, Irvine, Calif. • Nov. 1–2, Baltimore, Md.


**Seeds of Change: The Earth Charter and Human Potential** • Apr. 19, Garden Grove Park, Garden Grove, Calif. • Nov. 17–21, Points Park University, Pittsburgh, Penn.

**Seeds of Hope: Visions of Sustainability, Steps Toward Change** • Apr. 26–Jun. 2, Santa Clara, Calif. • May 1–31, Silicon Valley Center, Santa Clara, Calif.

**Victory Over Violence** • Jan. 18, Martin Luther King Jr. Youth Conference, Atlanta, Ga. • Jan. 21–28, Bayview Neighborhood Street Fair, San Francisco, Calif. • Feb. 11, Orange Coast College Club Rush, Costa Mesa, Calif. • Mar. 16, Cherry Blossom Cultural Festival, Columbia Park, Torrance, Calif. • Mar. 26–28, Tuskegee University Club, Tuskegee, Ala. • Mar. 30–Apr. 4, Pasquerilla Spiritual Center, University Park, Penn. • May 2, College of San Mateo, San Mateo, Calif. • May 10, Violence Prevention Convention, University of California, Santa Cruz, Calif. • May 22–26, Alburgh Elementary School, Burlington, Ver. • May 23–27, Empire State Plaza, Albany, N.Y. • June 21, New York City Block Party • Jul. 10, College of San Mateo, San Mateo, Calif. • Sept. 20, Hyattsville, Md. • Sept. 27, Irvine Global Village Festival, Irvine, Calif. • Oct. 6–7, IS 62 Jr. High School, Brooklyn, N.Y. • Nov. 1–2, Baltimore, Md. • Nov. 13–14, University of New Mexico, Las Cruces, N.M. • Nov. 14–16, College of San Mateo, San Mateo, Calif. • Nov. 21–22, Monterey Institute of International Studies, Monterey, Calif.
“Peace is not some abstract concept far removed from our everyday lives. It is a question of how each one of us plants and cultivates the seeds of peace in the reality of daily living, in the depths of our being, throughout our lives. I am certain that herein lies the most reliable path to lasting peace.”

— Daisaku Ikeda

Waves of Hope and Friendship From Guam
Jan. 18–19, Tamuning, Guam — The second annual Latte Peace Festival, held on the cusp of the SGI’s 39th anniversary, was held at Tamuning Park, Tamuning, Guam, with co-sponsors that included such community partners as the SGI-USA, the International Committee of Artists for Peace, the Mayors’ Council of Guam and the Guam Visitors Bureau.

Lt. Gov. Raymond S. Tenorio, who praised everyone who participated in the festival, presented a proclamation, affixed with his signature and that of Guam Gov. Eddie Baza Calvo, declaring Jan. 18, 2014, as a day “promoting peace on Guam.”

Mayors’ Council Executive Director Angel Sablan, who served as the master of ceremonies, reminded the Guamanians of the significance of the latte stones to the island culture. The stone monoliths, carved from coral limestone by the indigenous Chamorros, were used as foundation material for their homes and to honor ancestors.

Cultural presentations included performance groups representing the Polynesian and Micronesian islands. Local bands performed native Chamorro music and local youth presented a Chamorro fire show.

“Unity in Community” Honors Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.
Jan. 20, Santa Monica, Calif. — Celebrating the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.’s life and accomplishments, the MLK Westside Coalition organized an event themed

Participants at the 29th annual celebration of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.’s life and work, held at the SGI-USA World Peace Ikeda Auditorium, Santa Monica, Calif., Jan. 20.
In which he shares a Buddhist perspective on global issues and offers solutions.

In this year’s proposal, Mr. Ikeda states that the challenge of value creation is that of linking the micro and macro in ways that reinforce positive transformation on both planes. He offers specific proposals focusing on three key areas critical to the effort to create a sustainable global society. The first relates to education with a particular focus on young people. Second, he proposes the establishment of regional cooperative mechanisms to reduce damage from extreme weather and disasters, strengthening resilience in regions such as Asia and Africa. Third, he discusses proposals for the prohibition and abolition of nuclear weapons.

2014 Peace Proposal Released


Since 1983, the SGI president has released a peace proposal annually on Jan. 26, the anniversary of the founding of the Soka Gakkai International in 1975, in which he shares a Buddhist perspective on global issues and offers solutions.

In this year’s proposal, Mr. Ikeda states that the challenge of value creation is that of linking the micro and macro in ways that reinforce positive transformation on both planes. He offers specific proposals focusing on three key areas critical to the effort to create a sustainable global society. The first relates to education with a particular focus on young people. Second, he proposes the establishment of regional cooperative mechanisms to reduce damage from extreme weather and disasters, strengthening resilience in regions such as Asia and Africa. Third, he discusses proposals for the prohibition and abolition of nuclear weapons.

Cherry Trees and Friendships Usher in Spring

Mar. 16, Torrance, Calif. — Celebrating the coming of spring, more than 500 members and guests of SGI-USA Los Angeles Beach Cities Region joined the third annual City of Torrance Cherry Blossom Cultural Festival, held at the Daisaku and Kaneko Ikeda Cherry Tree Grove in Columbia Park. The event was graced by more than 110 blooming
cherry trees, which are among the 500 that SGI President Ikeda pledged to the city.

At the festival, co-sponsored by the SGI-USA, the City of Torrance, the Torrance Sister City Association, the North Torrance Homeowners Association and the Torrance Craftsmen’s Guild, Torrance Mayor Frank Scotto expressed his appreciation for the cherry trees presented to the City of Torrance, beneath which people gather to “create great bonds of friendship.”

Morehouse Honors World Religions Expert

Apr. 3, Atlanta — Karen Armstrong, noted historian of world religions, was awarded the coveted Gandhi, King, Ikeda Community Builders Prize in a poignant ceremony held at Morehouse College’s historic Martin Luther King Jr. International Chapel.

The honor pays tribute to her efforts “to guide the world to mutual respect and peace based on a commitment and action for compassion.”

The GKI Community Builders Prize, created in 2011 by Dr. Lawrence E. Carter, dean of the International Chapel, symbolizes the shared vision of Mahatma Gandhi, Martin Luther King Jr. and Daisaku Ikeda to empower ordinary people to contribute to creating a more peaceful world.

Ms. Armstrong is the best-selling author of books on religion, including The History of God and The Spiral Staircase. Her thesis is that all the major world religions held compassion to be the most important practice at their inception. But this teaching gradually gave way to other values tied to cultural and baser human instincts along the way. Ms. Armstrong holds that humanity must reclaim the teaching of compassion if it is to create a peaceful future.

Waking the Buddha Goes on Tour

“I’m hoping Waking the Buddha helps make up for all my previous disparagement of the Lotus Sutra,” author Clark Strand quipped. As a former Zen Buddhist monk, he said that for years, he
often disregarded and disrespected Nichiren Buddhism and the SGI. “If my book now becomes a tool for SGI-USA members to continue their good work, I’ll be very happy.”

Mr. Strand visited nine cities across the United States—New York, Boston, Chicago, San Francisco, Oakland, Calif., Seattle, Las Vegas, Los Angeles and Laguna Hills, Calif.—where he lectured to and conversed with more than 3,000 people, to promote his new book Waking the Buddha: How the Most Dynamic and Empowering Buddhist Movement in History Is Changing Our Concept of Religion.

A highlight of his lectures was when he delved into the tragic consequences of the old, authoritarian religious model, in which life is secondary to religion. “If life is made to serve religion,” Mr. Strand says, “then religion serves commerce and the military, commerce and the military serve the state, and the state always goes to war.”

The egalitarian nature of the SGI discussion meeting is just one example of the SGI putting life first. Here we sit in circles, “one Buddhist talking to another,” as he puts it. There’s no favoring of the opinions of one class of people over another. Moreover, Mr. Strand pointed out that the SGI invites anyone to take on leadership roles of one sort or another. Not only does this style empower the individual, it’s key to humanity’s survival.

“A top-down model of religious practice cannot address the issues humanity will face in the future,” he says. “They have to be solved by community, by consensus and by dialogue.”

Faith Groups Unite for Nuclear Abolition
Apr. 24, Washington, D.C.— A united call to action toward the abolition of nuclear weapons, based on the strong reminder of the devastating humanitarian consequences of atomic devices: This was the theme and final resolution that emerged from the interfaith symposium “Making a Difference: Faith Communities and the Humanitarian Impact of Nuclear Weapons.”


Representatives from diverse faiths, including Buddhist, Christian, Jewish and Muslim traditions, came together with disarmament policy experts to renew their commitment for a world free of nuclear weapons.

Throughout the day, more than 100 participants exchanged views on the next steps toward promoting a broader sense of urgency for the elimination of the threat of nuclear weapons.

To give more tangible shape to what might otherwise seem an abstract threat, keynote speaker Andrew Kanter, a board member of Physicians for Social Responsibility, painted a scenario based on research of the havoc that even minimal nuclear weapons engagement would bring.

“We are at a crossroads,” Dr. Kanter warned. “If we do not remove these weapons from our world, it is inevitable they will eventually be used. There is no luxury of time; we must act now.”

Dr. Kanter continued: “But there is hope as long as...”
we try to reach out to all people in this battle. As an Indian proverb says ‘We do not inherit this planet from our ancestors, we borrow it from our children.’”

The day concluded with a presentation of the historic “Joint Statement of U.S. Religious Communities on the Humanitarian Consequences of Nuclear War,” which was signed by representatives of 14 faith traditions. The document acknowledges the 70th anniversary of the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and the indispensable role that faith communities will play toward “enabling humanity to think about the unthinkable.” In addition, the joint statement contains six pledges by the faith communities toward a nuclear weapon-free world.

**City of Chandler Declares Daisaku Ikeda Week**

**Jul. 11, Chandler, Ariz.—** Marking the fourth anniversary of Daisaku Ikeda Week (Jul. 10–16, 2010, and named by the city to acknowledge the SGI-USA Central Territory’s Rock the Era youth culture festival on Jul. 10, 2010), the weeklong Daisaku Ikeda Photo Exhibition opened on Jul. 11 at Chandler City Hall’s Vision Gallery.

At the photo exhibition event, city councilman Kevin Hartke, in a pleasant surprise, presented a proclamation to the SGI-USA declaring Jul. 11–17, 2014, Daisaku Ikeda Week. The citation acknowledges the efforts of the local SGI-USA members, who, for more than three decades, have promoted “opportunities for people from all walks of life to work together to create a shared vision for peace, cultural understanding and education in the community.

In his remarks, Councilman Hartke expressed that, as a leader, peace is the “gift that we can give our community and bring others along, and resolve issues that others are struggling with.”

**Celebrating Juneteenth the Buddhist Way**

**Jul. 13, New York—** Juneteenth, the oldest nationally celebrated commemoration of the ending of slavery in the United States, emphasizes family, education and achievement. The New York celebration focused on empowering members to rediscover a strong sense of mission as Buddhists of African descent and served as an opportunity to introduce family and friends to the practice.
The cultural performances included traditional African drumming, a jazz band, spoken word and an energetic youth dance piece set to such influential works as Maya Angelou’s “Phenomenal Woman” and Miles Davis’ “All Blues.”

SGI President Ikeda’s poem dedicated to the “Century of Africa” was read and was part of his acceptance speech upon receiving an honorary doctorate of social sciences from South Africa’s University of KwaZulu-Natal in April 2013.

Celebrating Hiroshima-Nagasaki Peace Day

Aug. 9, Dallas — Honoring the lives lost in the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in August 1945, SGI-USA Dallas hosted the third annual Hiroshima-Nagasaki Peace Day.

The event was held at the SGI-USA Dallas Buddhist Center in collaboration with the Dallas Peace Center, a local nonprofit dedicated to promoting peace and human rights. Participants conducted a memorial service for the deceased victims and reconfirmed their commitment toward a world free of nuclear weapons.

Highlights included a presentation on the SGI-USA student division’s “Our New Clear Future” movement—which aims at building a global consensus by 2015 for the abolishment of nuclear weapons by 2030—and a talk by Jan Sanders, of the Dallas Peace Center, on the ability of sunflowers to absorb toxic radiation in soil. She cited examples in Chernobyl, Ukraine and Fukushima, Japan, where sunflowers were planted following nuclear disasters to help accelerate the recovery of those regions.

Spirit of Aloha

Oct. 4, Hilo, Haw.— The County of Hawaii’s Fifth Annual World Peace Festival this year was held on Coconut Island, also known as Moku Ola or “island of life,” a location considered a safe haven, a place for healing and refuge.

Some 2,000 people came together to promote the “spirit of Aloha” and “cultural diversity for
the creation of a peaceful world.” The SGI-USA co-sponsored the event in partnership with the Hawaii County Mayor’s Office, the County Department of Parks and Recreation, the Hilo Downtown Improvement Association, the International Committee of Artists for Peace, Hawaii Youth Exchange, and other businesses and private citizens. Participants enjoyed performances, cultural displays, arts and crafts, and delicious culinary treats.

In his official welcome, Mayor Billy Kenoi expressed his appreciation to the local SGI members for being “filled with love and Aloha,” and he especially acknowledged SGI President Ikeda for providing the inspiration that makes this festival possible. “Hawaii is one special place,” he said, “because everybody is family.”

**Daniel Pearl Concert Sounds Call for Peace**

**Oct. 5, Santa Monica, Calif.**— After their son, Daniel Pearl, was murdered in 2002 while on assignment for *The Wall Street Journal* in Pakistan, Dr. Judea and Ruth Pearl launched an international network of musical concerts to honor his legacy as a musician and journalist. Every October, the month of his birth, Daniel Pearl World Music Days concerts are held around the world to reaffirm humanity’s commitment to tolerance and peace.

Mrs. Pearl, together with her husband, Dr. Judea Pearl, spoke at the 13th annual Daniel Pearl World Music Days concert hosted by the SGI-USA’s Ikeda Kings Orchestra before 700 people at the SGI-USA World Peace Ikeda Auditorium in Santa Monica, Calif.

“We continue to do our share of using music to empower, inspire and unite people around their common humanity.”

The concert showcased big band jazz, swing and Latin music. In a message to World Music Days, U.S. President Barack Obama praised the international network of concerts, whose mission is to unite “passionate, thoughtful individuals” who are dedicated to “what we can build together, rather than what can be destroyed.”
SGI-USA Buddhists participating cheerfully in PRIDE parades and events in Albany, N.Y., Boston, Cincinnati, Los Angeles, Philadelphia and St. Louis.

SGI-USA Buddhists volunteer to help build a home with Habitat for Humanity in the Hey Rock Court area of Charlotte, N.C., Sept. 20.

Photo credits clockwise from top Michael Jemison, Jean Tao, Andy Reker, Gary Muire, Antonio Barrera, Dave Goodman, Susan Unger
The Future Is Youth

“To young people in particular I wish to say: The world is yours to change. Your dreams, your hopes and aspirations—these will create the future. They are the future. The future already exists—in the hearts and minds of the young.”
—Daisaku Ikeda

America after the late Norman Cousins, an American journalist, author, professor and political activist, rallied financial support from the American public. The Cousins family later adopted her.

Mrs. Sasamori expressed how happy she was to see many young people at the event so she could pass the baton to them in the fight against nuclear weapons.

Following the opening ceremony, dialogue circles were held Mar. 5–6, with the exhibition’s showcase coming to a close on Mar. 7.

**Penn State Takes a Stand for Victory Over Violence**

**Apr. 4–14, University Park, Penn.**— The SGI-USA student campus club, Buddhism for Peace, collaborated with Penn State University, University Park’s Center for Ethics and Religious Affairs to host the Victory Over Violence exhibition Apr. 4–14 at the

**Chapman Debuts “Transforming the Human Spirit”**

**Mar. 4, Orange, Calif.**— More than 70 SGI-USA student division representatives and guests explored how to transform a culture of violence into a culture of peace during the unveiling ceremony of the SGI anti-nuclear weapons exhibition “From a Culture of Violence to a Culture of Peace: Transforming the Human Spirit” on Mar. 4 at Chapman University in Orange, Calif., which was followed by a series of events throughout the week.

Keynote speakers included atomic bomb survivor Shigeko Sasamori, founder of Hiroshima and Nagasaki Peace Projects. Mrs. Sasamori was 13 years old when she was severely burned during the Hiroshima atomic bombing on Aug. 6, 1945. She became known as one of 25 “Hiroshima Maidens” chosen to undergo reconstructive surgery in

**Buddhism for Peace, the SGI-USA’s student division campus club at Penn State University, University Park Campus, debuts the Victory Over Violence exhibition, University Park, Penn., Apr. 4.**
Pasquerilla Spiritual Center, a central location on campus.

The Victory Over Violence campaign was launched in 1999 by the youth of the SGI-USA in response to growing concern over youth-related violence, such as the Columbine High School shootings in Littleton, Colo. Since then, more than 1 million people have taken the VOV Pledge for Nonviolence. The campaign approaches the topic of violence in three ways: 1) examining the relationship between passive violence and physical violence as a model for understanding the cycle of violence; 2) promoting the role of virtue-based dialogue as a protective factor, primarily at the individual- and relationship-levels, but at the community- and societal-levels as well; and 3) understanding passive violence as a risk factor to be overcome at all levels.

At Penn State, approximately 600 people observed the VOV exhibition, and on Apr. 8, a special viewing took place in conjunction with the university’s “Honoring Survival: Transforming the Spirit” event, paying tribute to those who suffered domestic and sexual violence.

After the special viewing, the “Buddhism for Peace” campus club members hosted a dialogue during which participants shared personal experiences and thoughts about encountering violence in their lives. They also exchanged ideas about how they could contribute to peace on both the individual and societal levels.

**Columbine Opens Friendship Garden**

**Apr. 24, Littleton, Colo.**— Marking the 15th anniversary of the tragic shooting at Columbine High, the school collaborated with local SGI-USA members to open the Friendship Garden, located on campus just outside the Dave Sanders Memorial Softball Field.

Staff, faculty, alumni, students, parents and local SGI-USA members who attended the opening planted 13 cherry trees in honor of the 12 students and teacher (Dave Sanders) killed in the mass shooting on Apr. 20, 1999.

The SGI-USA donated the cherry trees to the school as an expression of their shared commitment to peace and nonviolence. Principal Frank DeAngelis, who helped plant the first cherry tree in the new garden, shared his resolve on behalf of the community to continue the work of peace.

A mother shared her personal experience, recalling how she had brought her children, as babies, to the makeshift memorials in 1999. She then expressed...
The Future Is Youth

gratitude that her son, a current Columbine High student, could take part in planting the trees for the sake of peace.

The “Right of Peoples to Peace”

Sept. 19, New York — SGI-USA high school division representatives from New Jersey and New York joined other students from across the country at the United Nations Headquarters in New York, for the Student Observance of the International Day of Peace.

In his opening address, U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon referred to the students as “the leaders of tomorrow” and repeatedly stressed the importance of their participation in this event.

The observance included presentations by students, as young as 14, who had begun peace initiatives in their own communities. Their sense of responsibility and diligence inspired many of the youth attending.

Although many of the participants had little in common, they were bound by their belief in the right of every individual to peace. In this regard, every student stood on common ground with the current leaders of the United Nations. And just as the youth who presented their initiatives at the event acted upon their will to spread peace and improve their community, so too can each youth make significant contributions to spreading peace in the world.

“New Clear Future” at UC Berkeley

Oct. 18, Berkeley, Calif. — The SGI-USA student campus club at University of California, Berkeley, gathered community members and experts in an event themed “Applying Moral Force to the Humanitarian Consequences of the Nuclear Weapons Movement.”

Dr. Robert Dodge, of Physicians for Social Responsibility, and Francesca Giovannini, an associate of the Project on Managing the Atom at Harvard University, were among the expert panelists who discussed the dangers of nuclear weapons. Dr. Giovannini, who works in the field of international security, remarked that there is reason to be hopeful and that many nations are taking action in government to prevent the use and development of nuclear weapons, including some 113 countries that are now part of Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zones.

In 2011, the SGI-USA student division launched its “Our New Clear Future” movement, a campaign to create public consensus within civil society by 2015 for the abolition of nuclear weapons. It is a direct response to second Soka Gakkai President Josei Toda’s 1957 Declaration for the Abolition of Nuclear Weapons and to SGI President Ikeda’s continued call for nuclear abolition.
To Develop the Culture of Peace

“The SGI is a gathering of individuals who practice Nichiren Buddhism out of a wish for the happiness of all people. You could even say that the SGI is working to invigorate and brighten the world. Buddhism is manifested through our actions and comes to life in our interpersonal relationships. And the essence of these interactions is to encourage one another.”
— Daisaku Ikeda

The SGI-USA Culture of Peace Distinguished Speaker Series provides a forum for experts on a broad range of topics, all ultimately addressing global issues of peace to foster a culture that rejects violence and addresses the root causes of conflict through dialogue. This series commenced in 2007, with lecturers focusing on one or more of the eight action areas defined by the 1999 United Nations Declaration and Programme of Action on a Culture of Peace.

The eight action items are:

1) Fostering a culture of peace through education,

2) Promoting sustainable economic and social development,

3) Promoting respect for all human rights,

4) Ensuring equality between women and men,

5) Fostering democratic participation,

6) Advancing understanding, tolerance and solidarity,

7) Supporting participatory communication and the free flow of information and knowledge and

8) Promoting international peace and security.

Some of the events held nationwide in 2014 include:

The Greater Los Angeles Chapter of the U.S. National Committee for U.N. Women held a gathering to discuss ways to create a safer, empowering city for women at the SGI-USA Culture of Peace Resource Center, Santa Monica, Calif., Jan. 11.

On Women’s Rights and Safe Cities
Jan. 11, Santa Monica, Calif.— More than 100 people attended the “Second Annual Assembly: Safe Cities LA” presented by the Greater Los Angeles Chapter of the U.S. National Committee for U.N. Women, at the SGI-USA Santa Monica Culture of Peace Resource Center.

The meeting’s focus: Reimagining a landscape where girls can be, do and thrive. The ultimate goal of the day was to lay the groundwork for a future in which Los Angeles would be declared a U.N. Safe City.
According to U.N. Women, its Safe Cities Global Initiative has resulted in increased rights, protection and empowerment of women.

Santa Monica Mayor Pam O’Connor shared a proclamation declaring January 11 U.N. Global Safe City Day in Santa Monica. Following the award ceremony were several stories of personal triumph over the dangers of urban life.

A recurring theme was the power of a single individual to make change in one’s community. In one particular short video Blank Noise, individual citizens pledged, in their own words, to take personal action to stop street violence and to make cities safer. In this spirit, conference attendees were also invited to write their own Safe Cities pledge.

The jubilant day progressed in a series of short films, speakers, group discussions, performances and a closing panel. Those present represented a range of civically active entities ranging from the healthier foods movement to long-standing NGOs.

Some key solutions to making cities safer involved providing safe passage to and from schools. Supplying students with bus passes and other access to transportation was seen as a clear and direct manner of reducing truancy. Open sharing of ideas as to when and how to intervene in cases of bullying in both the school and work environment were also discussed.

A Path to a Nuclear Weapon-Free World

Jan. 25, Santa Monica, Calif.— Some 100 people gathered at the SGI-USA Culture of Peace Resource Center in Santa Monica, Calif., for a lecture featuring Dr. Tad Daley, the author of Apocalypse Never: Forging the Path to a Nuclear Weapon-Free World.

Dr. Daley heads the Abolishing War programs at the Center for War/Peace Studies, a New York-based think tank that aims to establish an international political and legal system that will make possible the abolition of war.

To avert a future nuclear incident, Dr. Daley proposed re-examining documents drafted by the generation that grappled with nuclear peril in the immediate aftermath of World War II. These documents, he said, discussed possible methods to control nuclear weapons and avoid future use.

Dr. Daley credited grass-root movements that have generated public revulsion toward nuclear weapons for helping avert nuclear war for the past 69 years. He claimed that such movements of ordinary people will be necessary to achieve further progress.

In response to the question posed by the day’s theme, “Can Abolishing Nuclear Weapons Lead to Abolishing War?” Dr. Daley answered in the affirmative.
He then proposed that key to achieving the longer-term goal of the abolition of war was the development of “an ethic of human unity.”

“This is what I believe will serve as the key force that will someday bring us what we might call those twin abolitions and no less than a new dawn for the whole human race,” he said. “It’s the idea that everyone today, before the abolition of nuclear weapons, ought to declare themselves to be both citizens of their country and citizens of the world.”

**A Forum for Peace of and for the People**

**Feb. 18, New York**— Dialogue was among the central themes that Dr. Betty Reardon, a founding figure in the field of peace education, took from three decades’ of SGI President Ikeda’s peace proposals to the United Nations, key excerpts of which have been compiled into the book *A Forum for Peace: Daisaku Ikeda’s Proposals to the UN*, in association with the Toda Institute for Global Peace and Policy Research.

Dr. Reardon was among a panel of three experts on peace to speak before a packed house at the SGI-USA New York Culture Center on Feb. 18 at the event “A Forum for Peace.” She was joined by Anwarul K. Chowdhury, former Under-Secretary-General and High Representative of the United Nations, who pioneered the U.N. initiative on the Culture of Peace and who wrote the foreword to the book, and Dr. Olivier Urbain, director of the Toda Institute for Global Peace and Policy Research, who compiled and edited the proposals in the book and wrote its afterword. The panelists shared their own reflections on *A Forum for Peace*, as well as their thoughts on how the book can be used to inform and inspire actions for peace.

Each panelist encouraged readers to engage in dialogue with the proposals and with one another about them. In exploring ways to facilitate this, ideas for further content were offered. For example, creating a teaching manual for the book, or a children’s version to inspire young people. “What people fail to recognize about dialogue is that who sits at the table matters,” Dr. Reardon reminded the audience.

Many participants were inspired by the discussion on how to make the peace proposals actionable.

Global visioning is a key component of President Ikeda’s philosophy, Dr. Urbain noted. It means that we imagine what kind of world we want in 100 years and then decide what must be done now to create it.

**Becoming a New America**

**Mar. 9, Chicago**— Six hundred SGI-USA Buddhists and friends gathered Mar. 9 at the SGI-USA Chicago Culture Center to participate with renowned historian and champion of human rights Vincent Harding in his talk “Why America Will Be,” centering on his recently published dialogue with SGI President Ikeda, *America Will Be!*— *Conversations on Hope, Freedom, and Democracy.*

Among the distinguished guests were members of Dr. Harding’s family, including his wife, Aljosie, who is also a Civil Rights pioneer. Cook County Commissioner Robert Steele, and Founder and Executive Director of The Black Star Project Phillip Jackson also attended the talk.

Dr. Harding said what he believes this country
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Langston Hughes’ 1935 poem “Let America Be America Again,” which was referenced in Dr. King’s “Beyond Vietnam” speech:

O, yes,
I say it plain,
America never was America to me,
And yet I swear this oath —
America will be!

Dr. Harding shared what he felt Hughes was saying: “I am dreaming of an America that does not yet exist, but I am convinced that it can exist, and I am committed to see to it that it will exist.”

Dreaming is not the end, Dr. Harding emphasized. Dreaming, he said, is the pathway to working, knowing what we’re working for because we have been dreaming it for a long, long time. He then encouraged the audience that we, the people of the United States, in order to work for a more perfect nation, must have our own dream about what a more perfect nation would be like.

Participants then spent 20 minutes discussing with the people around them their dream of a new America.

Whitman, Shine on Forever

Jun. 5, New York — SGI-USA Buddhists and friends gathered at the New York Culture Center on Jun. 5 to hear Karen Karbiener, a native New Yorker and esteemed Walt Whitman scholar, speak about the writer’s history and impact on her beloved city in her talk “Peace and Poetry in Whitman’s New York.”

True to the central theme of the SGI-USA Culture of Peace Distinguished Speaker Series, Dr. Karbiener demonstrated through her discussion of Whitman’s poetry that everything needed to create a new culture lives inside of us.

“Poetry matters,” she repeated, as she opened her lecture by reading excerpts from Whitman’s “Song...
of Myself” and SGI President Ikeda’s “Like the Sun Rising.”

Though the two men never met, Dr. Karbiener pointed out how poetry can foster dialogue across generations. “These two men have clearly spoken with each other,” she said, covering various instances in their poetry when the two speak to and about America on similar themes, calling for peace, openness, strength and understanding, and pointing again and again to the Buddhist concept of dependent origination: that everything is interconnected. “They have definitely found communion with each other,” she said.

Dr. Karbiener said she tries to make poetry come alive for her students by taking them to places in New York, such as the Brooklyn Bridge, to read Whitman’s “Crossing Brooklyn Ferry.” She encouraged the youth group to read poetry in a place they are comfortable and love, rather than studying it.

The lecture was both preceded and followed by robust Q-and-A sessions, first with the youth dialogue group — where participants said it quite literally felt as if Whitman were in the room with them, opening everyone up — and then with the audience at large.

When asked about her own relationship with Whitman, whose poetry she always carries so she can take it out and read it anytime she needs inspiration or encouragement, Dr. Karbiener described it as something of an eternal dialogue: a reflexive relationship that is like a mentor-student relationship. “He calls and I respond,” she said.

**Peace With Each Moment**

**Oct. 16–17, New York**— When Dr. Sarah Wider met SGI President Ikeda for the first time in July 2006 in Tokyo, she said his words validated something she had always believed but struggled to keep alive in a challenging environment.

“President Ikeda told me that we are in this world to do difficult work, to rededicate our lives to our work for peace,” recalled Dr. Wider, a professor of English and women’s studies at Colgate University and former president of the Ralph Waldo Emerson Society. “This was the first time that someone had legitimated my work for peace in such a profound way. The affirmation by President Ikeda that we are all in this work together was transformative. Everything came into brilliant focus like ‘Yes, this is exactly how life is!’”

Dr. Wider joined a series of events Oct. 16–17 at the SGI-USA New York Culture Center, including a dialogue with youth representatives, a meeting with members of the young mothers group and the...
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Dr. Sarah Wider, professor of English and women’s studies at Colgate University, gives a Culture of Peace talk on “Listening Through Time: Building Peace With Each Moment” at the SGI-USA New York Culture Center, New York, Oct. 16.

SGI-USA Culture of Peace Distinguished Speaker Series talk “Listening Through Time: Building Peace With Each Moment.”

During her Culture of Peace talk, Dr. Wider emphasized that the ability to create peace in every moment requires the power to listen. She described listening as an art, one that requires hard work. “We all have a person in our life who enables us to learn how to listen or a place that calls us to listen, moments that invite or even demand us to listen,” she said. “Listening is never solitary; it always occurs in the moment.”

“I Am How This Change Begins”

Oct. 17, Chicago— Bonnie Boswell Hamilton, an Emmy Award-winning journalist, worked for a decade to independently produce a documentary about her uncle Whitney Young Jr. Mr. Young was among the pivotal proponents of the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom, which would later be recognized as one of the largest political rallies for human rights in U.S. history.


On Oct. 17, Ms. Boswell Hamilton spoke about her uncle’s contributions to the U.S. Civil Rights Movement and how her own views have evolved. Her talk “Beyond Racism,” held at the SGI-USA Chicago Culture Center, touched on her uncle’s pioneering role in relations with important powerbrokers of his day, at a time when they had no experience interacting on an equal basis with African Americans. Those encounters led to groundbreaking changes in the inclusion of minorities in the private sector.

Her own journey of moving beyond the effects of racism took a profound turn when she began practicing Nichiren Buddhism. “I learned that changing ourselves impacts our environment, and if we can do that, we can bridge the gap between people,” she said, adding that this transformation occurs when individuals overcome their own limitations and recognize their shared humanity.

Emmy Award-winning journalist Bonnie Boswell Hamilton delivers her talk “Beyond Racism” as part of the SGI-USA Culture of Peace Distinguished Speaker Series, Chicago, Oct. 17.
Dancing on the Stage of My Mission
Karine Plantadit
New York City

Growing up in France and Cameroon, I was considered a “wild child.” I learned early on to push my feelings deep down so I would always appear happy and carefree. Inside, however, I often felt like a failure.

I suffered emotional abuse that was a result of my father’s deep-rooted anger. The only time I felt free was when my mother took me to dance class.

In Cameroon, at age 12, my whole life seemed to change when I saw the American musical film Fame, which inspired me to become a full-fledged dancer. At 15, I persuaded my parents to allow me to move back to France so that I could study dance. After two years there, I moved to New York to attend The Ailey School, and in 1991, I joined the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater.

While on tour in 1993, I first heard the sound of Nam-myoho-renge-kyo and started chanting that day.

When I returned to New York from touring, I made a determination to build a career on Broadway. I chanted for my goals every day and was cast in several wonderful plays like “The Lion King” and “Movin’ Out.” However, during one of my performances, I injured my foot and was sidelined. I was extremely discouraged and after receiving encouragement, I determined to strengthen my Buddhist practice. I supported a newly formed district by hosting meetings for SGI-USA Buddhists living in Harlem who were also artists. After four months, I returned to “Movin’ Out” and enjoyed a successful three-year run.

I then won the role of lead dancer in the Broadway production of “Come Fly Away.” With this great benefit came a major challenge; while my body was being pushed to greater physical heights, it began breaking down. I started experiencing such severe hip pain that I would wake up in tears in the middle of the night. I had MRIs, physical therapy and cortisone shots, but the pain remained constant. I determined through the power of my prayer and the sincerity of my practice that I would absolutely dance again with no pain. While chanting one day, I

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“An inner change for the better in a single person is the essential first turn of the wheel in the process of making the human race stronger and wiser. This ‘human revolution’ is, I believe, the most fundamental and most vital of all revolutions. This kind of revolution—an inner process of self-reformation—is completely bloodless and peaceful. In it everyone wins and there are no victims.”

— Daisaku Ikeda
I realized that my prayers were full of fear—fear that failure would mean the end of my career. I decided that rather than being stuck in fear, I would roar like the lion king and, through the power of my prayer and the sincerity of my practice, I would absolutely walk and dance again. With this renewed resolve, I found a doctor who correctly identified the problem and agreed to do my surgery for free. Although it was a complete success, recovery was slow and painful.

Every morning, I chanted abundantly and used my spare time between rehearsals to encourage other SGI-USA Buddhists. Day by day, my body grew stronger; first, I limped through rehearsals, then walked and, soon, I was able to dance in high heels.

“Come Fly Away” opened on Broadway Mar. 25, 2010, and was a huge success!

For the next two years, I enjoyed this success and the opportunities it offered.

Then, on May 13, 2013, I received a horrific phone call from my brother. My father had been murdered during a business trip in Cameroon. I was devastated. I traveled to Africa with my family; we determined to bring his remains back to France. I was encouraged to chant for the person who murdered my father so I decided to share Buddhism with this person to sever this cycle of violence.

I had only 10 days to negotiate all the bureaucracy of the police, the French consul and the African morgue. I succeeded in accomplishing all this. And before leaving Africa, I met the 28-year-old suspect in jail and introduced him to Nichiren Buddhism and the SGI.

At 43, I was back on Broadway as lead dancer in the production “After Midnight.” I also won a role in my first short film and appeared in another film that opened nationwide in December 2013.

I hope to create a new genre of art through incorporating dance and film, and for it to become a new category of the Oscars, hoping that this will allow many young dancers to expand in their creative process.
the doctor earlier. It was such a struggle for me to chant, but many fellow SGI-USA Buddhists came to my home to chant with me. Chanting was the only thing that got me through the rigorous chemotherapy treatments for the next four months. Every day, I had horrible side effects; I was nauseous, and couldn't eat or sleep. I also lost a lot of my hair, and my skin became bruised while my nails turned black. My eyesight was also going bad.

Because my husband had to work long hours to support our family, I had to cook and clean for my children among other daily tasks. Every moment, I was consumed by fear, but I chanted. Every day, I experienced excruciating stomach pains, but I would lie down and chant. Every day, I would cry and cry, but my tears would always fall while I was chanting. Chanting put my mind at ease.

My family was really struggling because of my cancer, so I wanted to do something to brighten our situation. In April 2011, we drove three hours to a gem mine in Hiddenite, N.C. Although I was not feeling well, I was so happy that the boys were having a great time. We mined for gems and walked about on the trails, but then Craig's legs started bothering him with burning pains. We thought it might just be growth pains, so we sat down to take a break before doing some panning and returning home. Craig had complained of pains in his legs before that day, but because of my own health problems, I couldn't see how much he was suffering. It wasn't until that night after we returned home from the gem mine did I realize that something was seriously wrong with Craig.

That evening, Craig was screaming with pain. His legs became weaker and weaker and by morning, he could not feel his legs at all. My husband called 911, and Craig was taken to the emergency room. The doctor did not know what the problem was, so Craig was transferred to two more hospitals before doctors discovered that an arteriovenous malformation, a knot of tangled veins and arteries, had ruptured inside his spinal cord. The pressure from the blood leakage had crushed the nerves in his spine. The doctors said that although they could remove the malformation with surgery, there was a 90 percent chance that Craig would be in a wheelchair for the rest of his life. Devastated, I collapsed on the floor.

Craig worked hard during rehabilitation in the hospital and chanted to keep his spirits up. He had great support from neighbors, family, school friends and SGI-USA Buddhists, who chanted for him to walk again.

Craig's illness tested my faith. Every day, I felt like I was in hell. As a mother, I struggled so much at that time because all I wanted to do was take care of my son. I was still undergoing chemotherapy, so all I could do was chant. Some days, I wanted so badly to escape my pain and die, but I knew I had to be strong for the both of us. I was also very appreciative of my husband and mother-in-law, who took care of Craig in the hospital.

In July 2011, after Craig had been home for a couple of months, I had already finished my chemotherapy treatments and had a biopsy, which unexpectedly showed several tumors in my right breast. That same month, I underwent a full mastectomy, followed by three months of radiation therapy. During that time, my biggest challenge was supporting Craig throughout his rehabilitation. I was still weak from radiation therapy, and my husband was at work all day. It took all my energy, needing to carry the wheelchair and sometimes Craig too. I hoped he would walk immediately, but I still had doubts about our situation.

I studied SGI President Ikeda's encouragement that prayer is like a flame of resolve that blazes in our heart, and the instant we chant, we have already
Through his Buddhist practice, Marc Giannavola, of New York, comes to recognize the dignity inherent in the lives of those closest to him and awakens to his own dreams in the process.

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won. I realized that I wasn't chanting powerfully enough about my health and Craig's health so I decided in that moment that we would win!

Immediately after my determination changed, Craig made dramatic improvements. In fact, the very next day, Craig miraculously began taking baby steps, calling out to me, "Look Momma, I'm walking!"

Little by little, Craig continued to push himself. Even though he had good days of being able to walk without assistance, at times, his legs would give out. With strong determination, now he can fully walk without any assistance on crutches or a wheelchair.

Today, I am cancer-free. I'm doing very well, health wise, and have so much energy. And I am proud of my family. We got through these obstacles together and have such a strong family bond. And today, when I share about my amazing family with my mother, she is proud. I finally have the confidence I was lacking.

Discovering a Life of Appreciation and Joy

Marc Giannavola
New York

A year ago, you could have described me as negative, standoffish and generally unhappy. Though I hadn't experienced any serious hardships in life, I lacked appreciation for everything and everyone around me.

My attitude caused me to be so short and dismissive that classmates in college would approach me and say things like: “Why don't you like me?” or “What's your problem?” I'd constantly get into arguments, which sometimes led to physical fights.

My attitude became a bigger issue when I moved back home to Connecticut after graduating from college in May 2012. I constantly fought with my mother's fiancé and it became so bad that he eventually asked me to leave their home in October 2012.

Within a few weeks, I moved to New York City. I was excited to pursue my lifelong dream of becoming a world-renowned photographer. However, my problems continued to follow me. I found a girlfriend, but showed her little consideration. I eventually decided to break up with her on my birthday after she bought me a present. When I began to miss her, I asked her out to brunch, and she told me she was seeing someone new. I was so upset. I felt like I had done nothing wrong.

After that, I began reflecting on our relationship and realized each of my past relationships had ended the same way for the same reason—I could not appreciate and respect whomever I was seeing.

I became increasingly hopeless. My stress and negativity began to aggravate my psoriatic arthritis—a recurring condition that causes my knees to swell, making it excruciating to walk. To escape from the pain, I would often turn to drugs.

Every day, I constantly complained about my situation to my roommates. Sick of my moaning, one of my roommates had the courage to invite me to an SGI-USA introduction-to-Buddhism meeting. Although skeptical at first, I soon realized that the
Ruby: When Marc and I started dating in 2004, I had a son, Elijah, from a previous relationship. A year later, Marc and I welcomed our daughter, Sariah Unity. I was 19, and Marc was 18. We loved each other, but our relationship was intense and rocky. We fought a lot and sometimes violently. One day Marc went to help his cousin move a refrigerator and he never came home.

Then in the summer of 2012, we separated. After eight years together, I had to start a new life and be brave for our children, who took it hard. It was a painful experience for all of us. Marc saw our kids a couple of times after that, but by the end of the year, he completely disappeared from our lives.

Marc: I had been in a dark place for a long time and didn't take life seriously, not even my own life. Little by little the anger and hatred that built up inside me manifested in my leaving Ruby and our children. I left Ruby for another woman, thinking that I would become happy in my new relationship. I was only deceiving myself. My new girlfriend and I started doing recreational drugs, and I became addicted. I was like a robot, just getting through life doing nothing. I had lost all hope.

Ruby: For the first two months after Marc left, our children cried every day for their dad to come back. It was heavy for me to watch them go through such pain. I knew I didn't want to be back with Marc, but I felt like I couldn't do anything to help my children overcome their pain.

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Ruby: I made a determination to have my photography work shown in a gallery and to travel to Japan to photograph a new body of work. Within a month, a gallery owner contacted me, hosting my first show a few weeks later. In January 2014, I traveled to Japan to shoot two new bodies of work.

Through my practice, I realized that the source of my struggle was my own self-doubt. With my newfound sense of mission, I am determined to completely eradicate this tendency from my life and, seeking to embody the unwavering determination of SGI President Ikeda, become a world-renowned photographer.
One of the things that I chanted about was for my children to have a relationship with their father. In August, out of the blue, I received a call from Marc’s mother that he wanted to see the children. After eight long months, our children were so happy. They began to see him every week.

By the end of the year, Marc and I realized how much we missed each other. We wanted to do things right this time, and since then, we’ve been going through our journey to build a strong, happy family together. In this process, I also introduced Marc to Nichiren Buddhism and the SGI.

Marc: I was skeptical at first, but I realized I had nothing to lose. The best way to describe chanting was a feeling of waking up. For the first time, I started to reflect on my behavior and realized how much I had hurt my family. Chanting also enabled me to remember who I really was, a Buddha, a person with hope and confidence.

I became an SGI-USA member in January 2014, and today, I’m completely off drugs and taking good care of my health. I’m a musician, and chanting has brought back my creativity.

Ruby: We are now building our foundation and strengthening our trust and bonds as a family. Sariah Unity is now 8 years old; our son Ziah is 6. And Elijah is 11. Our children join us in chanting. They set their own goals and aspirations, and as a family unit, we all support one another to achieve them. For example, my daughter recently chanted to pass an important state exam for school. She was nervous at first but really happy when she found out that she passed. Challenging themselves in this way, our kids seem more confident, enthusiastic and secure. We also spend more time together by going to the movies and the park. Through chanting, I don’t dwell on the past anymore; I have a lot more inner strength.

Marc: Before practicing Buddhism, I couldn’t control my emotional outbursts. Chanting gives me clarity and a stronger will to make better choices. I am more aware of my surroundings and how my actions will affect those around me.

Ruby: We are creating the future we always wanted. My practice has taught me that you can transform your life, no matter what you’re going through, to persevere and never give up. Buddhism has taught me the lesson of cause and effect, of always being conscious of the choices I make based on the effects I want to see.

Marc: I now see that peace is possible, that there is a way to renew my life, a way out of the dark. The greatest benefit is I realized I am not on my own. The commitment of the SGI-USA Buddhists to help one another in faith is so great.