The Soka Gakkai International (SGI-USA) is an American Buddhist association that promotes world peace and individual happiness based on the humanistic teachings of Nichiren Buddhism as set forth in Nichiren's writings and demonstrated in practice by the Soka Gakkai's founding presidents. The SGI-USA, with more than 553 chapters and more than 90 centers, is part of the larger SGI network with more than 12 million members in 192 countries and territories around the world. Our members reflect a cross section of our diverse American society representing a broad range of ethnic and social backgrounds. The SGI-USA strives to contribute to American society in significant ways. Areas of focus span culture, peace activism, disaster relief, sustainability, and education.

SGI Buddhists believe that all people have the power to lead lives of great value and creativity and to positively influence their communities, society, and the world. Nichiren Buddhism stresses that the greatest fulfillment in life is found in working for the happiness of others.

In 2018, the SGI-USA held more than 2,500 neighborhood discussion groups across America each month. At discussion meetings people share with one another how they are applying their Buddhist practice in their lives and reaffirm their dedication for the happiness of each individual and in so doing provide the foundation for a happy society.

**Books Published**

Books by SGI President Ikeda:
- Faith, Practice, and Study: The Basics of Nichiren Buddhism
- A Foundation for Your Life: Essentials of Nichiren's Writings for Young Women
- Stand Up for Hope and Respect! Essentials of the Soka Gakkai Spirit

Other Books:
- A Baptist Preacher's Buddhist Teacher: How My Interfaith Journey With Daisaku Ikeda Made Me a Better Christian by Lawrence Edward Carter Sr., Dean of the Martin Luther King Jr. International Chapel
- La vida victoriosa: Una introducción a la práctica budista (The Winning Life: An Introduction to Buddhism)

**SGI-USA Buddhist Centers Opened**

There are more than 90 Buddhist centers throughout the United States and its territories (see the back cover for a complete list). The following centers had openings in 2018:
1. Santa Ana, California, January 6
2. Houston, Texas, June 3
3. Hilliard (Columbus), Ohio, August 5
4. Long Beach, California, August 26
5. Chandler, Arizona, December 2
6. Hampton, Virginia, December 9
7. San Antonio, Texas, December 9

**SGI-USA Original Youth Song “A New History” Debut**

**SGI-USA Home**

**“Buddhist in America” YouTube**

**Social Media**

- Website: Find us 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; “Composing Hope,” which profiles youth who discuss how their Buddhist practice has informed their work as artists; and “The Buddha Beat” features interviews with everyday people about their thoughts on Buddhism at www.youtube.com/user/SGIUSAmedia. The SGI-USA original youth song “A New History” is available. The song debuted live at the 50,000 Lions of Justice Festival in September. Check it out, like it, and share it with friends!
- Twitter: Find us at #OfficialSGIUSA
- Victory Over Violence (the SGI-USA youth-led program aimed at building a culture of peace): Go to www.vov.com
- Revolution in You: SGI-USA’s new anthem for the abolition of nuclear weapons. This music video was spearheaded by the SGI-USA student division as part of the “Our New Clear Future” movement, which aims to eradicate nuclear weapons by 2030—beginning with creating public consensus that will lay the groundwork for future policy. Hashtag at #newclear. Visit http://tinyurl.com/OurNewClearFuture.
- SGI-USA smart phone and android applications: Smart phone application available for free through Apple’s app store. To download the app, simply search for “SGI-USA” in the Apple app store. Android phone application available for free through Google Play store. To download the app, simply search for “SGI-USA” in the Google Play store.
- World Tribune: The World Tribune has a dynamic website featuring the SGI-USA publications, World Tribune and Living Buddhism at www.worldtribune.org
I am so pleased to introduce the Soka Gakkai International-USA (SGI-USA) 2018 Activity Report, offering some examples of our community involvement throughout the year. This is not meant to be a comprehensive report, but instead an overview of the variety of ways in which we engage with society at large.

SGI-USA created history in 2018 by hosting the “Lions of Justice Festival” on September 23 with some 50,000 young people attending at nine venues across the United States. With the theme “Ushering in an Era of Hope and Respect,” these youth pledged to take a stand and fight for the dignity of life, starting in their families, neighborhoods, schools, and places of work.

This festival was the 2018 focal point for SGI-USA’s continuing effort to contribute to American society in significant ways by promoting culture, peace activism, disaster relief, sustainability, and education. The ultimate aim of Buddhism and specifically of the Soka Gakkai organization which we are part of, is the creation of lasting peace throughout the world.

The hallmarks of the SGI under the leadership of its founding president, Daisaku Ikeda, have been (a) the dramatic growth of the SGI organization and (b) the broad diversity that characterizes its movement for promoting a philosophy of character development and social engagement for peace.

Mr. Ikeda has published more than 150 works, ranging from Buddhist philosophy to biographical essays, poetry, children’s stories, and photography collections. He is also the founder of the Soka (value creation) schools, a nondenominational school system based on an ideal of fostering each student’s unique creative potential and cultivating an ethic of peace, social contribution, and global consciousness. The Soka schools span kindergarten through graduate study and include a university in Tokyo, Japan, and another in Aliso Viejo, California.

Mr. Ikeda is also a staunch proponent of dialogue as the foundation of peace. Since the 1970s, he has pursued dialogue with a wide variety of individuals around the world in political, cultural, educational, and academic fields. More than eighty of these have been published in book form, with dialogue partners such as Arnold J. Toynbee, René Huyghe, Hazel Henderson, Linus Pauling, Sarah Wider, Herbie Hancock and Wayne Shorter, Mikhail Gorbachev, and Elise Boulding.

As a reflection of this conviction that dialogue is the path to building trust and understanding that transcend differences, SGI-USA members hold more than 2,500 neighborhood discussion meetings across America each month. At such meetings, people share with one another how they are applying Buddhist practice in the most important way—that is, in their lives. As religion journalist, Clark Strand notes: “At a SGI-USA discussion meeting, every voice is heard. Such meetings are egalitarian in spirit, democratic in practice, and decidedly life-affirming in their vision of how Buddhist practice might contribute to the happiness of the individual.”

This year’s Activity Report gives an overview of our youth driven “Lions of Justice Festival” as well as other initiatives that all focus on how SGI-USA Buddhists create value in their daily lives and play a positive role in their communities.

If you are interested in additional information about the SGI-USA’s movement for peace, culture, and education, we would more than welcome your inquiries.

Very truly yours,

Adin Strauss
General Director
Soka Gakkai International-USA
SGI-USA Exhibition Showings in the Community

**Building a Culture of Peace for the Children of the World** • July 29, SGI Plaza, Santa Monica, Calif. • Sept. 8–26, Loyola Marymount University, Los Angeles, Calif. • Oct. 27, San Marcos Buddhist Center, San Marcos, Calif.

**The Century of Women** • Oct. 27, San Marcos Buddhist Center, San Marcos, Calif.

**Children Are the Future** • March 6, East Los Angeles Buddhist Center, El Monte, Calif.

**Everything You Treasure—For a World Free From Nuclear Weapons** • Jan. 4–Feb. 23, Loyola Marymount University, Los Angeles, Calif. • Mar. 1–31, Schaumburg Township District Library, Schaumburg, Ill. • April 15, University of California, Los Angeles, Calif. • April 21–22, Colorado Northwestern Community College, Rangely, Colo. • August 1–31, Iowa City Public Library, Iowa City, Iowa

**From a Culture of Violence to a Culture of Peace: Transforming the Human Spirit** • Sept. 8–26, Loyola Marymount University, Los Angeles, Calif. • Sept. 23, Georgia World Congress Center, Atlanta, Ga.

**Seeds of Hope: Visions of Sustainability, Steps Toward Change** • July 5–18, United Nations Headquarters, New York, N.Y.

**SGI-USA: An Engaged Buddhist Community** • Sept. 23, Georgia World Congress Center, Atlanta, Ga.

**Victory Over Violence** • Jan. 15, Colorado College, Colorado Springs, Colo. • Feb. 8, College of San Mateo, San Mateo, Calif. • March 25, Columbia Park, Torrance, Calif. • April 12, Texas A&M University Memorial Student Center, College Station, Texas • April 20–24, Santa Monica Boulevard Community Charter School, Los Angeles, Calif. • April 20–30, Mariano Azuella Elementary School, Chicago, Ill. • April 22–June 3, Silicon Valley Buddhist Center, Santa Clara, Calif. • Aug. 16–25, Arizona State University, Phoenix, Ariz. • Aug. 23–Sept. 14, Savannah State University, Savannah, Ga. • Oct. 27, San Marcos Buddhist Center, San Marcos, Calif.

**Voices of Change: Artists Speak Out** • May 21–23, Richmond High School, Richmond, Calif.

The Physicians for Social Responsibility, Iowa Chapter, debuted the exhibition “Everything You Treasure—For a World Free From Nuclear Weapons” on Aug. 1 at the Iowa City Public Library. The exhibition, displayed throughout August, was co-created by the SGI and last year’s Nobel Peace Prize recipient, the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons. August 2018 marked 73 years since the atomic bombings in Hiroshima and Nagasaki; Iowa City, Iowa, Aug. 1.
As SGI Nichiren Buddhists, we believe at the root of the violence, disrespect, and inequality in our country is the anger, greed, and fear in the human heart. To change the world, we have to change ourselves, and inspire the people around us to change. SGI Nichiren Buddhism exists to help us win over our anger, fear, apathy—it exists to help us win over ourselves.

At the Lions of Justice Festival on September 23, 50,000 young people from all backgrounds gathered in nine locations—Atlanta, Chicago, Dallas, Honolulu, Los Angeles, Miami, New York, Phoenix, and San Francisco—to stand up for the dignity of life to proclaim that all people are worthy of respect and must be treated with the dignity they deserve.

Through musical performances, films, inspiring speakers, and the shared experiences of youth taking action in their daily lives to transform society, the young people affirmed their determination to make the twenty-first century one of lasting peace and awaken profound courage and hope in our friends, families, and communities throughout the country.

What Is a Lion of Justice?

A Lion of Justice is a person who

• courageously faces and overcomes any obstacles that stand between themselves and their dreams;

• fearlessly challenges the ways of thinking that justify hate, violence, and discrimination; and

• can joyfully unite with people of all walks of life toward developing a society based on the happiness of all people.

To develop into this kind of person and never give up in the face of opposition can be a challenge. Therefore, we need to be unbending in the face of obstacles, just like a roaring lion.

The youth of the SGI-USA believe that the currents of society have taken an unfortunate turn in the direction of division and isolation. Many are polarized politically, suspicious of those who are different, and take refuge in social media bubbles. While there are glimmers of humanism in our society, it is also undeniable that domestic violence, school shootings, discrimination based on race or gender,
and environmental destruction persist and have even become more prevalent. Looming over this is the threat of nuclear weapons, which threatens the right of all people to exist.

What is at the root of these problems? Buddhist philosophy teaches that social ills stem from the three poisons of greed, anger, and ignorance that exist in the hearts of people. For example, greed gives rise to economic inequality and hunger; anger, to hatred and discrimination; violence, to war; and ignorance, to environmental destruction.

What is the answer? It is for people to stand up in solidarity with the awareness that all life is precious and the solution lies in directly confronting the greed, anger, and ignorance that lies within the human heart. This can only happen when diverse groups of people unite through shared respect and understanding.

Lions of Justice Youth Vow

Olivia Saito and Mike O’Malley, the SGI-USA young women’s and young men’s leaders, presented the SGI-USA Lions of Justice Youth Vow at the 50,000 Lions of Justice Festival, Sept. 23.

1. VIEW THE PEOPLE OF THE WORLD, BEYOND ALL BORDERS, INCLUDING REFUGEES, AS FAMILY, EQUALLY WORTHY OF RESPECT.

2. END VIOLENCE IN OUR HOMES AND COMMUNITIES, AND FIGHT TO END THE SENSELESS KILLING OF PRECIOUS INDIVIDUALS!

3. CEASELESSLY ENGAGE IN DIALOGUE THAT UPROOTS IDEAS THAT JUSTIFY HATRED AND DISCRIMINATION. VIOLENCE, HATE, AND DISCRIMINATION HAVE NO PLACE IN THIS COUNTRY ANY LONGER!

4. REMEMBER THAT THE EARTH IS OUR COMMON HOME THAT WE MUST PROTECT AND WORK TOGETHER TO REDUCE HUMAN ACTIVITY THAT THREATENS THE SURVIVAL OF OUR PLANET.

5. FIGHT TO ABOLISH NUCLEAR WEAPONS BY 2030, BASED ON SECOND SOKA GAKKAI PRESIDENT JOSEI TODA’S 1957 DECLARATION TO ABOLISH NUCLEAR WEAPONS.
The Future Is Youth
In a special 50K performance, world-class musicians rock out to Herbie Hancock’s “Chameleon.”
Engaged Buddhism

“Sincerity is the key to transforming distrust into trust, hostility into understanding, and hatred into compassion. Friendship and trust are indispensable to true peace, and they cannot be cultivated strategically.”
—Daisaku Ikeda

SGI-USA Honors the Life and Legacy of Martin Luther King Jr.—“Never Lose Hope”

Jan. 15, Santa Monica, Calif.—“Never Lose Hope: Unity Wins” was the theme and spirit behind the 33rd Annual Celebration of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., held on MLK Day at the SGI-USA World Peace Ikeda Auditorium.

The event—cosponsored by the SGI-USA and presented by the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Westside Coalition—brought together various religious leaders, community activists, and local citizens who reaffirmed their commitment to building a society that cherishes the dignity of human life.

Attendees included city officials, Santa Monica College President Kathryn Jeffery and keynote speaker Tommie Smith, a 1968 Olympic gold medalist, human rights activist, and former Santa Monica College professor and coach.

The celebration also honored the youth who will light the way for a hope-filled future. Santa Monica High School senior May Kono (pictured second from right) received an education reward for her screenplay "Dare to Be," which was inspired by her Buddhist practice and touches on the themes of courage, friendship, and being true to oneself.

"I want to continue working toward my dream of becoming a screenwriter who can inspire others to be the change they want to see in the world," she said.


Guam Celebrates Latte Peace Festival and SGI Day

Jan. 20–21, Tamuning, Guam—Amid global political tensions that include the island of Guam's identification as a target of a missile strike by a foreign state, the Guam Municipality of Tamuning-Tumon-Harmon courageously continued its tradition of promoting peace, friendship, diversity, and cultural exchange—not only for the citizens and visitors of Guam, but for the entire world by hosting its Sixth Annual Latte Peace Festival on Jan. 20–21 at the Tamuning Mayor’s Office Park, across from the International Trade Center, where Daisaku Ikeda established the Soka Gakkai International on Jan. 26, 1975.

Running through the proposal is concern for the lives and human rights of refugees and migrants in the face of discrimination. Mr. Ikeda calls for focused efforts to ensure access to education for refugee and migrant children, especially those separated from their families.

He also identifies gender equality as essential to achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals, stating, “Gender equality and empowerment should not be regarded as just one element of the SDGs, but rather should be recognized as key to accelerating progress toward the achievement of the entire spectrum of goals.”

Finally, he calls for a U.N. international decade for the empowerment of women from 2020 to 2030, the target date for achievement of the SDGs.

Every year since 1983, Daisaku Ikeda has issued proposals to the international community offering a Buddhist perspective and solutions to global problems.

The full proposal in English is available at www.sgi.org.

People’s Movement.”

The main theme of Mr. Ikeda’s 2018 peace proposal is that a human rights-focused approach is key to resolving global issues, including the threat of nuclear weapons. In this year that marks the 70th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights [on Dec. 10], he stressed the need to make the life and dignity of each individual our focal point—the fact that every human being is inherently precious and irreplaceable.

Mr. Ikeda highlights the power of human rights education in overcoming social divides, stating that its real significance lies in reviving our desire to perceive the common humanity of those different from us. He proposes that youth be the focus for the fourth phase of the United Nation’s World Program for Human Rights Education, beginning in 2020.

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Engaged Buddhism

The award ceremony took place on Jan. 21. Guests included Benjamin Cruz, speaker of the 34th Guam Legislature, and Louise C. Rivera, mayor of the municipality of Tamuning-Tumon-Harmon.

Speaker Cruz meanwhile issued a second proclamation in honor of President and Mrs. Ikeda, commemorating SGI Day.

Bennoune shared her personal journey and highlighted experiences of resistance and resilience by ordinary people in Muslim majority countries, who often, at the risk of their lives, are combating the rising tide of religious extremism within their own communities.

Bennoune’s powerful conviction is that personal stories can help us appreciate the reality of the ongoing fight against Muslim fundamentalism and wake us from the numbness of the huge number of civilian casualties, too often recounted only as a passing statistic. The lecture was marked by a deep resonance and mutual appreciation between Professor Bennoune and all who attended.

Peace Starts in the Heart—Earth Day Celebration and “Victory Over Violence” Exhibition

April 20, Los Angeles—Local SGI-USA members participated in the Earth Day celebration and ribbon-cutting ceremony for the opening of the SGI-USA’s “Victory Over Violence” exhibition at the Santa Monica Blvd. Community Charter School, Fenton Public School, Los Angeles, Calif., on April 20. About 1,000 students, parents, and faculty signed the VOV pledge for peace and viewed the exhibition.

Your Fatwa Does Not Apply Here

March 20, New York—As part of the SGI-USA Culture of Peace Distinguished Speaker Series, on March 20, 2018, more than 350 people welcomed Karima Bennoune, professor of International Law at the University of California–Davis School of Law, former Amnesty International legal advisor, and U.N. Special Rapporteur in the field of cultural rights, meets with SGI-USA youth before her lecture as part of the SGI-USA Culture of Peace Distinguished Speaker Series, at the SGI-USA New York Culture Center, New York, March 20.

Based on her award-winning book, Your Fatwa Does Not Apply Here, and after a profound and warm dialogue with youth representatives, Professor Bennoune shared her personal journey and highlighted experiences of resistance and resilience by ordinary people in Muslim majority countries, who often, at the risk of their lives, are combating the rising tide of religious extremism within their own communities.

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Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) held in Geneva.

The NPT is regarded as the cornerstone of the global nuclear non-proliferation regime and an essential foundation for the pursuit of nuclear disarmament.

SGI representative Hayley Ramsay-Jones read the statement on behalf of the group, which comprises 20 diverse faith-based organizations and individuals. They urged all states to sign and ratify the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, which was adopted by 122 governments in July 2017, and to engage in constructive dialogue to advance the nuclear disarmament agenda.

The joint statement reads, in part:

As people of faith, we advocate for the right of all people to live in security and dignity, we seek to heed the commands of conscience and the call to justice; we are united in our determination to protect the vulnerable and to exercise the stewardship that will safeguard Earth for present and future generations. Nuclear weapons profoundly violate all these values and commitments.

We can never accept a conception of security that privileges the concerns of any state or nation over the good of the human and planetary whole. The horrible destructiveness of nuclear weapons makes their abolition the only path to authentic human security.

Ian McIlraith, SGI-USA Peace and Community Relations Director, introduced the exhibition and explained that the Victory Over Violence (VOV) campaign is a global movement of everyday people. Its mission is to inspire youth and adults to identify passive and aggressive violence and root out violence from their daily lives and communities by valuing their own lives, respecting all life, actively pursuing dialogue, and inspiring hope in others.

Justin Walker, SGI-USA Los Angeles Pan Pacific Zone young men's leader, shared his personal experience about applying the principles mentioned in the VOV exhibit into his daily life and how it helped him become a caring and compassionate person toward others and taught him the importance of having respect for the environment. He also shared that the environment is not separate from us, and that he and all people can make a difference by not committing any violence against our environment and instead doing our part to protect Mother Earth, such as putting trash in its respective receptacle, recycling, reusing and repurposing items to avoid trash over-population.

**SGI Joins Statement Against Nuclear Weapons**

**April 25, Geneva**—The SGI joined the group Faith Communities Concerned about Nuclear Weapons to present a powerful statement at the second session of the Preparatory Committee for the 2020 Review Conference of the Parties to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, Geneva, April 25.
“Buddhist in America” Series Wins Award

The SGI-USA’s “Buddhist in America” video series received an Award of Excellence in the 2018 DeRose-Hinkhouse Memorial Awards Video-Documentary/Educational category. The SGI-USA was the only Buddhist organization to be recognized among all categories.

Since its founding in 1929, the Religion Communicators Council has recognized and cultivated excellence in communications of religious faith and values.

This year, the panel received more than 250 entries, each one reviewed for its overall quality in concept, writing, creativity, and effectiveness. The “Buddhist in America” video that was submitted featured Gisell and Kaila, a mother and daughter using their Buddhist practice to create a victorious and harmonious family.

The “Buddhist in America” series, which launched in June 2012, highlights how everyday people use their Buddhist practice to overcome the difficulties of daily life. More than 715,000 people have viewed the series since its debut.

SGI Participates in the Venice, Calif., Cinco de Mayo Parade and Festival

May 5, Venice, Calif.—SGI-USA members from Los Angeles Coastal South and Santa Monica Chapters participated again this year in the Venice, Calif., Cinco de Mayo Parade and Festival on May 5.

Cinco de Mayo is celebrated in Venice with a family-friendly, free community event. The parade blends traditional Mexican cultural performances with Mexican American innovations including classic cars, traditional folklorico dancers, Aztec dancers, charro, floats, and a mariachi band.

The parade ended and transitioned into a festival featuring food vendors, piñatas, face painting, information booths, and other live performances.

Nurturing Seeds of Friendship

May 20, Denver—In an annual tradition that began in 1989, SGI-USA members of Rocky Mountain Zone celebrated the 30th SGI Cherry Tree Planting Ceremony on May 20 at Denver’s City of Takayama Park.

On hand to celebrate were Denver Mayor Michael Hancock; Consul General of Japan in Denver Hiroto Hirakoba; and Denver Parks and Recreation Manager Allegra “Happy” Haynes.

SGI President Ikeda sent a congratulatory message, saying in part, “Just like the beautiful cherry blossoms of Denver, I ask that you continue nurturing luxuriant flowers of happiness and joy throughout this community surrounded by the Rocky Mountains.” He also reminded the members that there

Members of Rocky Mountain Zone participate in the thirtieth SGI Cherry Tree Planting Ceremony, Denver, May 20. They sowed fifty trees this year.
A member of the Eastside Park Neighborhood Association, Joe Griffins, thanked the SGI-USA for its donation of the cherry trees and reminded the group that diversity of trees keeps an environment strong.

Unite, Stand Up, and Speak Up to Abolish Nuclear Weapons

May 16–17, Dallas—Dr. Ira Helfand is copresident of the International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War, a nonpartisan federation of national medical groups in 64 countries dedicated to mobilizing the influence of the medical profession against the threat of nuclear weapons. For its work, IPPNW received the 1985 Nobel Peace Prize. He also serves as a steering group member for the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons, a group that received the 2017 Nobel Peace Prize.

Dr. Helfand arrived in Dallas to speak with SGI-USA members and other Dallas peace and cultural organizations like the United Nations Association.
Dallas Chapter, the Dallas Peace and Justice Center, the PAX Christi USA, Peacemakers Incorporated, the Social Action Council First Unitarian Church of Dallas, and Physicians for Social Responsibility Texas about the next course of action that all people can take—to unite and stand up and speak out about the necessity for the abolishment of nuclear weapons.

A single U.S. nuclear weapon is 30 times the strength of the single bomb that was released on Hiroshima. Even one nuclear weapon released would cause catastrophic climate disruption dropping temperatures across the planet to levels not seen since the last Ice Age. Under these conditions, the vast majority of the human race would starve and it is possible that humans would become extinct as a species. This is in addition to the devastation of the human lives lost and the medical consequences that any survivors would be afflicted with afterward.

Speaking at the SGI-USA Dallas Buddhist Center, the host for the event, Dr. Helfand was emphatic about the urgency for social media to be used to spread the word to the youth and general population about the demand for the deactivation of nuclear weapons. Due to global politics, international civil unrest, and the transition of American society, citizens around the world are not dealing only with the tangible violence and injustices that are occurring daily, but the people are silently at the mercy of government officials to not initiate a nuclear war upon each other. The idea to use social media to educate the public will hopefully prompt individuals to take the necessary steps of action against nuclear weapons with their local organizations.

The Call to Prevent Nuclear War

A new nationwide grass-roots campaign “Back From the Brink: The Call to Prevent Nuclear War” is a collaborative effort of prominent public health, science, environmental, faith-based, and justice organizations, including the SGI-USA. The campaign highlights five action points to prevent nuclear war. As a result of their efforts, in August, the Los Angeles City Council and the California State Assembly and Senate passed resolutions supporting the U.N. Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons. For more information, visit www.preventnuclearwar.org.

SGI-USA Youth Representatives Attend Beatrice Fihn Lecture

Oct. 9, Brentwood, N.Y.—The Jonathan Schelle Memorial Lecture Series took place on Oct. 9 at the New School for Social Research and featured Beatrice Fihn, the 36-year-old mother and Nobel laureate who accepted the Nobel Prize in 2017 on behalf of the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons in her capacity as its executive director. ICAN is a coalition of nongovernmental organizations in 100 countries promoting adherence to and implementation of the United Nations Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons. This landmark global agreement was adopted in New York on July 7, 2017. ICAN is leading a new worldwide movement to abolish nuclear weapons once and for all by transforming the way we view nuclear weapons.

SGI-USA youth representatives in New York wanted to support and learn from ICAN and attend Ms.
Putting Beliefs into Action

Fihn’s lecture. Following the lecture, the youth had an opportunity to dialogue with the Nobel laureate, ask a few questions, share their determination as SGI-USA youth, and present Ms. Fihn with memorials from their 50,000 Lions of Justice Festival. Ms. Fihn shared fond memories of her visit to the Soka Gakkai Headquarters in Tokyo on January 17.

Ms. Fihn shared with the youth a plan for working together to support the treaty and achieve a world free of nuclear weapons—Educate, Motivate, and Activate.

Educate—Learn how your community (the services you use) is complicit in developing nuclear weapons; share with others the great humanitarian harm that will follow any nuclear attack and that will spread across borders; don’t let people forget that these weapons exist until it is too late.

Motivate—Tell people about the treaty; most have no idea that the treaty was adopted; people need to know and see that change is possible and that they have support on this issue and that this campaign has momentum.

Activate—Find concrete steps to encourage others to contact their government representatives and tell them that the United States should join the treaty.

Ms. Fihn encouraged the youth to do what women who have changed history have done for decades. When others say change is impossible, refuse to be constrained by others’ lack of vision and belief in humanity; when others say that you are crazy, keep going; and when others say it does not matter, know that it does.

Unity Walk Along Washington, D.C., Embassy Row

Oct. 14, Washington, D.C.—SGI-USA members in the Washington, D.C., area joined the Unity Walk, sponsored by the Interfaith Council of Metropolitan Washington. The Interfaith Council was created in 1978 to bring together historic faith communities to promote dialogue, understanding, and a sense of community to work cooperatively for justice through the D.C. region.

The annual Unity Walk is a public demonstration of solidarity and unity for all faith groups in the Washington, D.C., metropolitan area. It is a powerful antidote to the ongoing divisiveness we are
experiencing in our country today.

For the Unity Walk, each faith group sponsored their program including a demonstration of religious rituals, a tour of the building, an offering of traditional foods, and an introduction to the religion and its practices.

This enjoyable exchange with the community served to strengthen the SGI-USA bonds with neighbors, educating them about our beliefs, practice, and humanistic goals, and plant seeds of understanding and friendship for the future.

Fifth Annual Interprofessional, Interfaith Ethics Forum

Nov. 8, Baltimore—The University of Maryland–Baltimore’s Fifth Annual Interprofessional, Interfaith Ethics Forum was held Nov. 8 at the UMB School of Medicine’s Leadership Hall in downtown Baltimore.

More than 100 care workers, social workers, nurses, and doctors gathered to address the issue of creating resilience in the face of trauma.

Interfaith panelists were Rabbi Shmuel Silber, dean of the Institute for Jewish Continuity, and Rabbi of Suburban Orthodox Toras Chaim in Baltimore; Karen Gorden, professional musician and member of the SGI’s Buddhist network for peace, culture, and education; and Rev. Keith Ethridge, associate director of the VA National Chaplain Center.

The panelists presented various views on the way in which spirituality can contribute to a culture of resilience. A question-and-answer session with participants followed. A book display, relating Buddhism to wellness and resilience, was provided by the SGI-USA Washington, D.C., Culture Center.

Forum speakers includes Dr. Jane M. Kirschling, dean of the UMB School of Nursing, and Dr. Linda Grabbe, assistant clinical professor at Emory University in Atlanta.

The forum was presented by the Institute for Engaged Buddhism, the Living Legacy Foundation, the University of Maryland Schools of Nursing, Pharmacy, and Social Work, the UMB Graduate School, and the Maryland Healthcare Ethics Committee Network at Maryland Carey Law.

A Baptist Preacher’s Buddhist Teacher

Nov. 8, Atlanta—Lawrence Edward Carter Sr. was in crisis. As dean of the Martin Luther King Jr. International Chapel, he had spent nearly two decades striving to spread Martin Luther King Jr.’s philosophy of peace and nonviolence. But the results were not what he’d hoped and dreamed of. He felt despair and grief at all that had yet to be accomplished.
The world is a challenging place because it is a place of fear, he said. But the fearless will practice the words of Marie Curie that he asked the audience to repeat after him: “Nothing in life is to be feared, it is only to be understood. Now is the time to understand more, so that we may fear less.”

To understand more, we have to think differently, he said: Not in the box or out of the box but with no box. “The only sustainable way of thinking is thinking without a box, to think without limitations. Nichiren Buddhism is not a closed box. It places no limitations on your curiosity.”

Dr. Carter said the SGI president is a great example of a curious mind, citing his more than 80 published dialogues with people of all faiths and backgrounds as examples of President Ikeda’s willingness to learn from anyone.

“He’s setting an example for all of us to follow to become truly cosmic citizens,” he said.

Of course, “expanding your address,” as Dr. Carter noted, to include the cosmos isn’t easy. “Talking with people can be dirty,” he said, “but empathy comes from human interaction. President Ikeda sets a powerful example; he’s the tip of the spear of self-motivation, self-initiation, and lifelong learning.”

The evening included Dr. Carter signing books and greeting most of the 250 people who attended, including guests from the Atlanta interfaith community. Dr. Carter will also visit SGI-USA centers in New York in December, Chicago in January, and in Los Angeles and Washington, D.C., in March.

Just as he credits President Ikeda with helping him become a better Christian, perhaps Dr. Carter can help SGI members become better Buddhists. He certainly has great hopes for the work we do.

“President Ikeda is a nonviolent prophet, a prophet in the style of the Old Testament prophets,” Dr. Carter concluded. “In the long shadow of Gandhi and King, he’s saying today what they would be saying. Follow his example more seriously, enlarge your address and heal the world.”

Fortunately, around this time, in 1999, Dr. Carter was introduced to the work of Daisaku Ikeda and the SGI. He soon realized that the SGI leader’s vision for peace and happiness, or kosen-rufu, “was in the very process of realization and was no different from Martin Luther King Jr.’s vision of the world house.” His despair soon lifted when he sensed that President Ikeda and the SGI could provide him with “a blueprint for a world without violence.”


At an event to launch the book, held at the SGI-USA Atlanta Buddhist Center on Nov. 8, Dr. Carter focused on the power of curiosity and courageous conversation to bring about harmony in the world. The power of curiosity, he said, is the power of being open to learning from different cultures and understanding different ways of thinking.

“If you ask, What is war? the answer is fear. If you ask, What is hatred? the answer is fear. If you ask, What is intolerance? the answer is fear,” he said. “All of these varying forms of fear are rooted in ignorance. We don’t know each other, so we cultivate fear and hatred for those who are different.”
I Have a Story to Tell

I would look at women in magazines, on TV, at red carpet events, and Victoria’s Secret Fashion shows, and I would always say I wanted to do that, but I saw something really wrong with the fact that no one looked like me. I have a birth defect called spina bifida, which means I was born with a hole in my spine. I’ve had more than 20 surgeries in my life (to correct my feet and back, and even brain surgery twice). The doctors told my mom that I wouldn’t live to see my teenage years, but she didn’t accept that. My mom always instilled in me that I could make the impossible possible.

Society doesn’t expect people with disabilities to want much because they see us as people who don’t add much to society. We just exist. I felt that was wrong, because I knew that I had joy and a fighting spirit to share with others. And I knew that I had a mission to make an impact. I’m a black woman with a disability in Hollywood, and I’m the complete opposite of what they see as “beautiful,” and I feel like I stick out like a sore thumb.

Seeing how much Daisaku Ikeda fought despite whatever illness he was going through, with tuberculosis, coughing up blood, and going through so much, and still wanting to use his life to encourage someone else, I thought: “I want to be like that. If my mentor can do it, I can do it.” I wanted to use my life as a way to inspire someone else.

I just went for it. And it didn’t matter what others thought, as long as it was something that made me happy. I got a lot braver to go out and network. I said, “If no one is going to learn how to market me, I’m going to learn how to market myself.” More people started following my blog and wondering more
about who I was. It brought so many more opportunities for me. I never thought I would be able to sit here and tell you that I’m an international model or that I’ve met Tim Cook, the CEO of Apple, or that I’ve had the chance to be on TV, or have my work appear in a film festival. I never thought I would be able to say any of those things. I have a story to tell—there’s more to life than just existing.

I want to see more people with disabilities in TV and film. I will continue to fight for it because I feel unstoppable. I feel so victorious like a lion. I’m doing it gracefully, but I’m pouncing on it!

Fighting Injustice at the Root

Eric Kunimoto
Washington, D.C.

Soon after my parents moved from Japan to America, my mom became a victim of a violent crime. As a result, I became resentful, angry, and impulsive. My mother, on the other hand, earnestly participated in SGI activities and doubled down on her belief in humanity. I felt my mom was the strongest woman in the world.

My parents worked really hard to give me the life I had and, in order to give back to them, I felt I needed to do something in dramatic fashion. So, I thought, “What’s more prestigious, powerful, and influential than becoming a lawyer?”

I passed the Maryland and Washington, D.C., bar exams and practiced commercial real estate law as a means to transform America’s cities. Instead, I found myself working on multimillion-dollar commercial projects with no real sense of purpose or connection between the work I was doing and how I really wanted to connect with people and transform society. That’s when I decided to become a police officer.

What influenced my decision the most was my mother’s ability to transform her painful experience into belief in the power of humanity. I felt that there needed to be someone who could exemplify that spirit in law enforcement.

After making a career transition, I discovered that the daily reality of a police officer is not easy. You often see the darkest parts of humanity and the lowest states of life. I really felt that, more than anything else, people are really suffering.

Having a mentor in Daisaku Ikeda is the greatest treasure of my life, because I can always look to an example of how to live life with courage, compassion, and wisdom. If I didn’t have that, it would be so easy to merely see criminals as criminals; it’s more complex than that. I clearly see people battling the three poisons of greed, anger, and foolishness. We must attack the problem at the root by changing the negative impulses in our own hearts.

With this spirit, I did my best as a patrolman to
connect with the people on my beat and build a sense of community and trust. Early this year, we received an award from the chief of police for decreasing violent crimes on my beat by 40 percent. Society really needs and is yearning for people to stand up in the face of injustice, starting with the person in front of them.

Undeniable Good Fortune
Catalina Perez
New York

When I encountered the SGI, I was a struggling single parent and sad at the direction that society had taken. It was 1982, and the peace and environmental movements I had been involved in were not progressing as I had hoped. I lived in a dangerous neighborhood in San Francisco with my young daughter, Paloma, and was on welfare. It was in such times that an SGI-USA pioneer told me, “If you practice Nichiren Buddhism, your child will be protected.” This had been my biggest concern, and it moved me to begin practicing.

My first benefit was that Paloma was accepted into a wonderful preschool for free, and they agreed to care for her from early in the morning before anyone else arrived. This enabled me to go to school to study nursing while working to support my family.

I had never been able to do anything consistently before, but the rhythm of my daily Buddhist practice permeated my life, and I became more determined and hopeful over time.

One of the biggest things I wanted to change was living paycheck to paycheck. A senior in faith encouraged me to cement my financial fortune by contributing monetarily to further kosen-rufu, so I started making monthly contributions and came to take great pride in this. Despite my financial limitations and flighty nature, I completed my degree in licensed practical nursing in 1983. This was my first significant career accomplishment, and it opened the door to more job opportunities. Three years later, my second daughter, Caridad, was born!

Determined to do my best for my daughters, I chanted to further my education so that I could become a registered nurse.

As a result of these causes, I gathered the money to purchase a humble three-bedroom home in San Francisco in 1990. It was modestly priced and located across the street from the day care Caridad attended.

In 1992, I saw my human revolution coming to fruition in my career. After 10 years, changing schools three times, many stops and starts, and faith encouragement—all the while working and caring for my daughters—I became a registered nurse. Just months prior to the licensure exam, I had my third daughter, Nikki, and in 1994, Amelia, my fourth daughter, came into this world.

As my girls grew up, we faced many challenges as a family, and I wasn't always the perfect mother.
But I prayed to support my daughters’ dreams and for solutions to the various problems they faced. I chanted through their illnesses, when they stayed out all night, and when they got into trouble at school. When Amelia was accepted into a performing arts high school in New York, I decided to make the move and find a job there.

When I didn’t know what was best for us, I just chanted that we would have a happy, secure, and harmonious family.

I could see undeniable fortune building. My two oldest daughters attended top private schools on scholarships, and Nikki’s and Amelia’s father paid for a wonderful education for the two of them.

Although I’m not wealthy, through various opportune circumstances, I’ve turned around my hardships to help three of my daughters purchase homes. And I own my own apartments in both New York City and San Francisco — cities with some of the most expensive real estate markets in the United States!

Today, I’m happier than I’ve ever been. I have a wonderful family with four terrific daughters, a kind and compassionate son-in-law and soon-to-be son-in-law, and two fabulous grandchildren. My daughters and I are close and enjoy one another’s company. Our harmonious family is the greatest benefit so far.

Although very different, each of my daughters is creative and socially conscious. They are all practicing Buddhism and pursuing their dreams.

In addition, in 2015, at 60, an age when most are nearing retirement, I continued to challenge myself and earned a bachelor of science in nursing degree. Today I work as a lactation consultant. I’m beyond convinced of Nichiren Daishonin’s words “If one lights a fire for others, one will brighten one’s own way” (The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin, vol. 2, p. 1060).

All my efforts and contributions for kosen-rufu, for a more just and peaceful world, have manifested as great fortune for my family.

A Philosophy of Limitless Transformation

Albert Grange
Dallas

I first heard about Nam-myoho-renge-kyo from my cousin when I was 18 years old, and in 1986, I was introduced again by my girlfriend, Veronika, who is now my wonderful wife. I was never a spiritual person, but the practice made sense to me, so I received the Gohonzon and gave it a try. Within a month, I became a district men’s leader, and I started to see the practice working in my life. I had a lot of self-doubt and lacked hope, but by the end of my first year of practice, I got a significant promotion at work and married the love of my life. Practicing this Buddhism enabled me to feel passion for life.

My wife and I raised our two children, Meredyth and Gabriella, in the SGI, which gave them a spiritual basis for respecting their own lives and others. Because of that, one of my greatest challenges has been watching my own daughter Gabriella go through depression.

When my wife and I first heard about Gabriella’s depression, we were very sad. Her battle with depression led her to start cutting herself out of a desire to feel something. Initially, the cutting made her feel good, but she soon realized that she needed another solution, so she decided to seek therapy. When she told her therapist about her issues, the therapist laughed at her and told her to stop cutting herself. Gabriella could not believe the therapist’s reaction and became even more anti-social and lost the will to live.

We kept thinking: “How did this happen? How did we not see this coming?” We assumed that Gabriella was okay, because she was smart and always followed the rules. We began to chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo with an intensity like never before. We wanted to be there for her when she was ready to open up.

After graduating from college, Gabriella moved in with us because she had student loans and no concrete post-graduation plans. But for six months, she was unemployed and depressed. We encouraged her to make causes for her life and she took on responsibility as an SGI-USA district young women’s leader and participated in a behind-the-scenes training group.
Albert Grange challenges himself with courage to take action to help his daughter Gabriella win over her self-doubt and in the process transforms his own suffering.

Gabriella participated in the SGI-USA youth 50,000 Lions of Justice Festival and used her experience to encourage others and repay her debt of gratitude to the many people who supported her. Through her experience for the festival, Gabriella even reignited her dream of becoming a world-class cellist.
West Territory

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