

SGI USA MEMMO

DATE

July 29, 2002

MEMO NO.

PLN-027

TO: All Zone, Region and Office Managers

DISTRIBUTE TO: All SGI-USA District Leaders and Up

FROM: SGI-USA Organization Department

SUBJECT: ** New SGI-USA Guidelines for Membership**

In his February 1990 guidance, President Ikeda states: "I believe it is preferable that strict standards be applied when granting admission to the organization, to the extent that those eager to join will find that their wish is not so easily granted.... Also, one must absolutely never have an easygoing or careless attitude when it comes to allowing people to receive the Gohonzon."

Our enthusiasm in the 1980s in propagating Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism and lack of propagation standards led to excesses such as some people receiving the Gohonzon who knew very little about the practice, or who really had no interest in chanting, and who either had no place to enshrine the Gohonzon or no intention of enshrining the Gohonzon. As a result, in the early 1990s, a stringent set of requirements was created in our efforts to respond to President Ikeda's guidance. These standards attempted to "legislate" appropriate judgment, rather than offering common sense guidelines that relied on the wisdom among our leadership as to how to help an individual become a member of our organization. As such, the standards up until now are probably more stringent than required given that over the last 12 years we have matured as members of this organization and have developed a better understanding of the humanism of our kosen-rufu movement.

As we now embark upon making Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism a "world religion," it is an opportune time to reconsider the guidelines for new membership in our organization, always keeping the heart of President Ikeda's guidance as the foundation. With this understanding, the SGI-USA Central Executive Committee (CEC) unanimously adopted the following new guidelines for a person to receive the Gohonzon.

New SGI-USA Guidelines for Membership:

1. Wants to practice and shows this desire through learning gongyo and chanting daimoku. This ensures that the individual is receiving the Gohonzon of his or her own volition.
2. Is able to enshrine the Gohonzon (family members and living conditions support the individual's decision to receive the Gohonzon). This ensures that the Gohonzon is protected.
3. Is firmly connected to a district that is able to provide thorough aftercare by the sponsor and other members of the district. This ensures that the individual receives consistent nourishment in faith and remains connected to the SGI-USA organization.

4. Receives an orientation of the SGI-USA and temple issue through a new members seminar. This ensures that the new member is aware of the basics of faith, the fundamental spirit of the Soka Gakkai, the temple issue and cognizant of the fact that he or she is joining the SGI-USA and not simply becoming a Nichiren Buddhist. (*Details of the curriculum of these seminars will be described in a future SGI-USA memo. In cases where the new member-to-be isn't able to attend a seminar, a personal meeting with a district or above leader should be arranged to conduct this orientation.*)

Which Gohonzon can new members receive?

The first Gohonzon received should be the regular size Gohonzon for the individual's private residence. However, college students living in dormitories who meet the above guidelines and/or whose families already have the Gohonzon can receive an Omamori Gohonzon—the smaller Gohonzon carried on one's person for travel—as their first Gohonzon.

Where should the Gohonzon be conferred?

In general, all new members should receive the Gohonzon during a conferral ceremony conducted by an Area-level leader or a leader specifically designated by a Region-level leader (i.e. Chapter-level or District-level leader, depending on the circumstances).

Individuals who cannot attend Gohonzon conferral ceremonies for serious health reasons such as a protracted illness or disability may receive the Gohonzon in their home.

How do we determine eligibility to receive the Gohonzon in special cases?

Common sense, based on dialogue, should be used to determine whether or not to confer a Gohonzon upon an individual facing extraordinary circumstances. It is the responsibility of the Area Planning Committee, in discussion with the Chapter and/or District leaders, the new member, and the sponsor, to make this determination.

In cases where a minor (under 18 years old) wishes to receive a Gohonzon, the Area Planning Committee, with the help of the Chapter and/or District leaders, should make sure that the individual's parents/guardians are aware of his or her wish to join the SGI-USA, and give their consent.

What is the publications requirement?

Receiving and reading SGI-USA publications is an integral part of our practice, but it should not become a stumbling block to someone receiving the Gohonzon. With this in mind, the members of the SGI-USA Central Executive Committee (CEC) recently adopted a motion to revise the guidelines dealing with new members-to-be and mandatory subscriptions to the *World Tribune*.

While subscribing to the *World Tribune* is not mandatory to becoming a member, we strongly recommend that each member do so throughout his or her practice. This is to ensure that each member is learning about the practice and principles of Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism and is connected to our wider movement for kosen-rufu.

If you have any questions regarding the content of this memo, please contact your local CEC representative or zone leader.