

Introductory material for new Group or Area Leaders

"I hope that you will accept as your mission a lifetime of effort at discovering ways to help others summon from the depths of their beings and show to all the strength and joy of life." (A Lasting Peace p44)

"As Soka Gakkai members, our endeavours to reach out to others and share our philosophy with them are inspired not only by our wish for their happiness but the desire to work together with them in actualizing peace and prosperity in our communities and society as a whole. That's why it is so important for us to be people who are not only trustworthy and dependable, but also a source of inspiration to others. We can only do this if we don't succumb to egoism or self-absorption, but keep striving to elevate our state of life day after day. Please know that this process leads directly to our personal growth and human revolution." (SGINL 7842)

This document contains a very basic outline of the SGI movement in Australia and information for newly appointed leaders to support the members.

Welcome

Congratulations on your appointment to your leadership position in SGI Australia.

All leadership positions in SGI carry the same responsibility and spirit; to do our utmost to support the growth and happiness of other members while striving to grow ourselves, as an example and encouragement. In fact, the more sincerely we pray and make effort to care for and support others the more our own state of life is nourished and expands, as described by the Buddhist principle that when we light a lantern for others, our own way forward is lit. The unchanging basis for this path of mutual growth is the consistent one-to-one dialogues that we courageously engage in. Taking initiative to reach out to those we are supporting and sharing our challenges, victories and determinations together is the lifeblood of our noble, humanistic movement.

I hope that, based on your prayer and seeking mind towards President Ikeda, you will apply yourself to your leadership responsibility, learning from and growing together with other members, contributing to the blossoming of a culture of humanism in your respective communities.

Introduction

This document is not intended to be comprehensive. To enable each person's full application of their initiative and creativity, we have taken a minimalist approach to drafting this material. Nevertheless, some documentation is necessary to ensure a consistent experience for members and guests across the country as we each strive to enact kosen-rufu in harmony with each other and the vision of the three founding Presidents of SGI. In this endeavour, dialogue between members and leaders at all stages of practice, seniority and experience, is unconditionally necessary if we are to sustain a culture of humanism within our movement that celebrates diversity as encouraged by our mentor, SGI President Daisaku Ikeda.

Group Discussion Meetings

"If we assume that the goal of religious faith for the individual is a constant process of value-creating, how shall we describe the society that we are striving to build – that is, the society of kosen-rufu? In the past, I have described it in various ways; and in the future, I shall continue to try to elucidate its nature from many angles. But, in brief, I think I can call it a creative society. It will be a

society in which all human beings can live in a truly human fashion, in which everyone is constantly improving himself. We are striving, not for an insipid, dry, formalized society, but for one with limitless possibilities for creative development. I am convinced that this is the true image of the society of kosen-rufu. (A Lasting Peace pp37-38)

Through the transformative power of Nichiren Buddhism, we are each able to forge our own indestructible state of happiness while living out our daily lives in contemporary society. The group movement remains the core activity through which we can help others do the same. In this global movement for human solidarity, we each have the opportunity to develop our capabilities in self-expression and to facilitate it in others. Sharing our struggles and victories in human revolution has the capacity to connect us to a surprising diversity of people. The connections we forge with those of diverse cultural and life experience creates a peaceful and humanistic world while simultaneously reaffirming our confidence in its possibility.

The purpose of SGI group discussion meetings is to create a 'spiritual oasis' where members and guests feel inspired and refreshed in their determinations. Polishing our own unique expression through faith-based dialogue, we deepen our conviction in the value of our human revolution as a contribution to society. As we individually transform our lives and gain confidence, others in our environment will naturally be inspired and wish to connect. Our community will only achieve sustainable growth if we take the initiative to expand our circle of friendship in this manner. There is no need to pressure others to join meetings and doing so will often create the opposite desired effect.

Allowing the youngest and least experienced members of our groups to gain confidence in expressing themselves by promoting a non-hierarchical environment in which members and guests feel free to question and discuss anything, will ensure that meetings remain dynamic and invigorating.

For practical purposes, the following is encouraged:

- A regular rhythm for meetings will assist guests to attend consistently
- Meeting with members and guests of the group outside of group meetings will foster friendship and trust, this often enables the dialogue at the meeting to flow more freely
- Indigo magazine is the monthly publication for SGI Australia members. Using it as study material for group meetings supports the organisation as well as providing consistency and unity around the country
- Smaller meetings provide guests greater opportunity to discuss their questions and challenges with greater depth. Many people are hesitant to speak up in larger meetings due to shyness or self-consciousness
- As the meeting grows larger, it provides an opportunity to foster a new group leader from within the group. Splitting the group into two when it becomes too large is a process that should be conducted in dialogue with the members and area leaders to ensure all perspectives are considered and arbitrary decisions are not taken unnecessarily.

Please see appendix A for the Guidelines for Groups and Group Meetings.

Becoming a SGIA Member

“Each Soka Gakkai member embodies the entire Soka Gakkai. Wholeheartedly encouraging each individual member we encounter, therefore, will serve to invigorate the entire organisation. As long as open, one-on-one dialogue is fostered, our organisation will continue to flourish. This means giving confidence to those feeling lost and confused, hope to those burdened with worries, courage to those sunk in despair, joy to those filled with sorrow, wisdom to those beset by hardships, staying power to those facing setbacks, peace of mind to those gripped by fear, and conviction to those stalled by uncertainty. Such a steady stream of encouragement becomes a powerful source of revitalisation. It fosters bonds of joint commitment, of working together for a common cause. Through these supportive efforts, we actually take a step closer to happiness for both ourselves and others. (SGINL 7908 - The Three Kinds of Treasure – Part 2)

Becoming a member of SGIA is a significant expression of support in the values and charter of SGI and guests should therefore be encouraged to join SGIA as a member if they have been participating in group activities consistently and intend to continue doing so. However, membership is not required for subscription to Indigo magazine or attendance at most SGIA activities although it is recommended prior to attending training courses.

The cost of membership is \$5¹ and is required when appointed as a leader. This is not a yearly fee but applies for the life of the member. Membership of SGIA is also required for Gohonzon application, introduction letters to other countries and to the Hall of the Great Vow for Kosen-rufu in Japan, which can be obtained by contacting the SGIA office (details in Appendix E). It is a requirement of those organisations that letters can only be provided to those who are members of SGIA. Membership is not transferrable between countries and those who have migrated from overseas will need to complete the form and submit the fee to become members of SGIA.

The membership form is provided in Appendix B. Please see Appendix C for Gohonzon application and enshrinement guidelines and Appendix D for the Gohonzon application form.

Privacy

SGIA collects basic information about members and guests on a periodic basis to better understand and provide support for individuals and groups. Please make all efforts to protect the privacy of all members, guests and leaders by not distributing this information outside of the official channels including any public Internet/social media sites. Please also ensure protection of SGIA by not misusing the information collected, eg by subscribing people to mailing lists without their consent or contacting them about matters outside of SGIA activities. Please see SGI Australia’s Privacy Policy in Appendix F.

Area Leadership

“The important thing is for each person to play a meaningful role and to make full use of his creative powers. In summary, attainment of Buddhahood for the individual is evoking one’s inherent Buddha World and making it a rich, unfailing source of creative energy for a brighter society. Developing this energy within the individual and manifesting it in society are the purposes of the practical activities of Soka Gakkai.” (A Lasting Peace p38)

¹ The charging of a membership fee is a legal requirement for SGIA. SGIA is registered as a Charitable, Not-for-Profit organisation and is governed by the associated ACNC body and the Corporations Act.

Area leaders provide essential support to group leaders and members both in faith and administration. Most significantly, they facilitate the group and area leaders' meeting, the purpose of which is to provide inspiration to group leaders in holding invigorating discussion meetings. Providing a safe environment for group leaders to honestly share the varied challenges of being a group leader is a deeply significant cause for each to share and overcome any challenges. It is also an avenue by which we are able to learn from each other, as well as promoting an ongoing and dialogue-based approach to the discussion of organisational matters. The meeting should begin with gongyo and study from *Indigo*.

Further Information

A diagram of SGI Australia's organisational structure is found in Appendix G.

General guidelines for members can be found in Appendix H. This document is also provided in the new members document along with Indigo subscription form, training course application form... etc.

SGIA has a Child Safe policy, for all matters relating to working with Children, please see Appendix I.

The following Appendices are available on the SGI Australia website:

<http://www.sgiaust.org.au/resources/policies/>

Appendix A: Guidelines for Groups and Group Meetings

Appendix B: Membership form

Appendix C: Gohonzon application and Enshrinement Guidelines

Appendix D: Gohonzon application form

Appendix E: SGI Australia office contact details

Email: admin@sgiaust.org.au

Phone: (02) 9763 2283

Appendix F: SGI Australia Privacy Policy

Appendix G: SGI Australia organisational structure diagram

Appendix H: General Guidelines

Appendix I: Child safety policy

Appendix J: Region, Area & Group Leadership - Responsibilities and Appointment Process

Appendix K: Guidelines for Leaders Striving on the Front Lines of Kosen-rufu