

President's Report: Giseikai 2017

This yearly report has two parts. The first part is a list of the highlights of activities that the Bishop and I engaged in during 2016 to address the objectives in the Ten Year Strategic Guide. In the following section, the phrases in **bold type** are the goals and objectives that are outlined in the Strategic Guide.

Part One: Responding to the Ten Year Strategic Guide

- We are **enriching the ties within the Buddhist community** by planning for an All Buddhist Conference on Oahu.
- We **recognized individuals who have contributed to society** through the 2016 Living Treasures program.
- We **responded to social and environmental issues in our community, the nation, and the world** through the work of the Committee on Social Concerns, Green Committee, and Office of the Bishop.
- We have endeavored **to live a life of compassion** with others by assisting **ordained ministers fulfill their ministerial duties** through the work of the Temple Leadership Effectiveness Program, by adopting the document, **Jodo Shinshu Ministry in Hawaii**, and by implementing the Auto Allowance policy.
- We assisted members to **live as a Nembutsu followers** through the newly establish Hawaii Kyodan Website, by resetting the purpose of the Commission on Buddhist Education, and by completing the first leg of our state-wide tour of temples. We also supported efforts to simplify the message of Jodo Shinshu with the publication of the *The Taste of Nembutsu*
- We worked to develop more **welcoming temples where both members and newcomers can gather** by explaining through Dharma messages and workshops what it means to be a Dharma-centered temple.
 - We supported the efforts of the Office of Buddhist Education to strengthen our Lay Ministers' Assistant Program.
 - We worked with the Ewa Temple and Kapolei Sangha to establish a stronger Hongwanji presence in West Oahu.
 - The New Expressions Committee was formed to explore relevant, expressive, and personal ways of engaging with the Dharma.
- We sought to **solidify the foundation of Jodo Shinshu Hongwanji-ha and Honpa Hongwanji Mission of Hawaii** by establishing and supporting the work of the Organizational Restructuring Committee

- We participated in the work of the Research and Planning Committee as it explored alternative revenues to **maintain financial stability**.

Part Two: What Next?

I am starting the second year of the second term in the Office of President. I have been a witness and participant in the affairs of Honpa Hongwanji Mission of Hawaii for 13 years. Everything I have experienced during this time tells me that the direction in which our organization is headed and the pace at which it is traveling is not good, to put it gently. I feel this rising sense of urgency that we need to shift our direction if we are to enjoy a hopeful future and we need to do quickly. I will say in the strongest terms, that anyone, minister or lay, who does not feel this rising sense of urgency is deluded and out of touch with reality.

I am a member of Jikoen, the champion of BBQ chicken and andagi sales. I know the reality of temple life. I know the time and sweat and money that our temple buildings, the Kyodan assessment, and our operational expenses consume. I see the dwindling number of temple members. And I know what it is to ask the questions: Is this what the Jodo Shinshu experience is all about? Is this what we ought to be doing? For now, at Jikoen, the answer is yes. This is what the Jodo Shinshu experience is all about and this is what we ought to be doing. But I know with a sense of urgency that we cannot continue exactly as we are with no change in direction.

So, what ideas do I have to offer to change our direction? Here it is.

First, our ministers must continue to live and share the Dharma with a humble sincerity that reaches into the heart of every member. They must review who they are every time they put on their ministerial robes because for temple members, the ministers' every action is the Dharma come alive. And here, I have to say that at Jikoen, the Dharma is alive and well thanks to Rev. Nishiyama.

Second, our Hongwanji community must become more and more engaged in the issues that relate to the suffering of others here in our community, in our nation, and the world. We must go beyond consuming Buddhist teachings in the safety of our temples each Sunday to becoming engaged Buddhists who speak out and act out our beliefs and the teachings. We issue statements as the Bishop and the Committee on Social Concerns did last week against the President's Executive Order on Immigration. We march as Lois and Tamayo and many Buddhist men and women did on January 21. We give care to others in Project Dana and Family Promise. We write letters; we make phone calls; we give money; we volunteer for causes that provide safety, comfort, and care for others.

Third, our ministers, in their Sunday Dharma Messages must speak of events that are unfolding dramatically in our lives as those precipitated by our President. They also must speak of the unseen and silent events unfolding in our personal lives. Personal events such as the struggle to provide care for our elderly parents, wives, and husbands. They must speak directly to the fears and joys, anxieties and celebrations of our young adults beginning careers and young parents raising families. Our ministers must speak often, clearly, and simply of just how the joy of the Dharma can find its way into the deepest parts of our lives. And if they do not how to do this with the diverse ethnic groups and diverse age groups that need to them, then they must feel an overwhelming sense of urgency and determination to learn.

Fourth, the reality of Jodo Shinshu is at its best it is a religion of relationships. Jodo Shinshu is a religion that is intuitive and spiritual. Since it is not easily accessible through intellect and reason and easy phrases, it is shared most readily through relationships build on kindness. If Jodo Shinshu is to have any hope of a future, we must develop ways of developing and sustaining relationships through which this intuitive, caring, and spiritual tradition can be shared.

As we consider relationships, we need to address the following questions in our temples:

- Who are the people with whom we are going to share?
- What exactly are we sharing? What is the message that is meaningful and understandable?
- How and who will we share the message?

This may sound like impossible questions. But I am here to say, “Not so.” There are answers! Last night I presented just one approach for sharing the message of Buddhism with young people learned from my 10 years at the Pacific Buddhist Academy and three years as president of the Kyodan. There are individuals in temples who have answers and know how to share.

Fifth and before we get ahead of ourselves, let’s return to paying attention to each relationship we have with each member of our temple Sangha. We need to smile, greet, and treat each with kindness. We need to grow and nurture each of those relationships so we feel that comforting and supportive sense of traveling together. Shinran referred to this relationship as ONDOBO ONDOGYO, that we are fellow travelers.

But as we travel together, let us not forget that we are imperfect and selfish beings. In the light of this truth, we must expect that there will be times when we fail and then catch ourselves in our failure to greet, failure to smile, and failure to treat another with kindness.

As temple members, we must communicate with the young people in our temples and in our families. For many of us, this means people anywhere from six years old to 60 years old. For some of us here, a person who is 70 is a young person. We must find opportunities to learn about their lives; what is happening to them in all facets of their lives. And when appropriate and relevant share pieces of our life and learning. For those in our temples, we must invite them in and enjoy their company. Make a place for them physically in our temples. Give them space to meet; let them use equipment; offer them access to the kitchen. Let them know that the temple is a second home. We must be ready to form relationships as deep as those we have with our children, with our brothers and sisters, with our best friend.

And finally, we, the lay leaders, must seek to understand and appreciate the foundation of our spiritual tradition, the Nembutsu, the sound NAMO AMIDA BUTSU. We must embrace it, find joy in it, say it, live it. And if we don't understand it, cannot find joy in it and have no urge to say it often with a profound sense of gratitude, then we better learn by reading about it, asking questions about it, talking about it and by saying it.

It is my conclusion that failure to do two things I just mentioned will mean your temple will close with certainty. First is failure to communicate with young people and second is failure to experience and connect with the true and joyful meaning of the Nembutsu.

In many of my past presentations, I say things sometimes without regard to the test of reality. I list actions that are to be carried out vaguely by a committee. I call on listeners to do things that are not clear. But today, every item on my list can be done by a temple. They are based in reality. To get started, all you need to do is put this list in front of your temple board and your minister and decide what each person on your board will commit to. It is really that simple.

Thank you.