

No. 7 (January 1, 2009)

## **HAPPY NEW YEAR!!!**

**January 1, 2009**

**Heisei 21 in Japan**

This is the Year of the Ox and the Ninth Star which denotes Fire in the Chinese calendar. According to these symbols, we will still have trouble with the economy because the ox symbolizes roughly 2 a.m.; which is cold and inactive. This is the year that we need to focus on mental and spiritual healing. Because the Ninth Star also symbolizes the south, summer and noon; your good and bad karma may come to the surface. Be careful if you move your house or business toward either north or south.

### **New Year's Greeting**

By Bishop Shokai Kanai

### **Education Is Most Important!**

**A Happy New Year to all members and supporters of the NONA**

My family doctor's letter suggesting that I not serve as Bishop was not accepted at the last convention in Houston, Texas. I was again nominated to serve as Bishop for NONA for another term.

We will not cut the budget for education in NONA despite the fact that many states and counties are cutting back on their educational and school funds. This is our chance to grow for the future. If we do not have education, there is no difference between us and animals. Human beings must be educated. Nichiren Shonin says, "There is no Buddhism without learning and practice."

I would like to improve the education for ministers, members and future members-to-be. First, Japanese ministers dispatched by Nichiren Shu Shumuin (the administrative head office) are educated in Buddhism in Japan but must study English. There are ten such ministers in North America, while there are eight American born ministers who have been educated at universities and graduate schools in America. However, no one majored in Buddhism at their schools. Although they finished *Otsu-shu* test at Minobu-san and completed Shingyo Dojo, more education is needed. Even ministers who graduated from Rissho or Minobu-san University need more education on Buddhism and Nichiren Shu. Therefore, we have had several seminars inviting several professors and ministers to NBIC and other temples and churches to further their knowledge. We also have the World Overseas Minister Meeting at Shumuin once a year and listen to various lectures through interpreters. We must continue this kind of study more often, so I have asked Shumuin to increase our budget for education.

Second, it is important to educate the present members of all temples, churches, sanghas and communities of NONA. All of the ministers are working hard day and night for you, members. He or she conducts many study classes and sermons. You may say, "Buddhism is too difficult to understand." That is true because Chapter Two of the Lotus Sutra states this, but in Chapter Four, having faith in the sutra will make you understand and practice better. Every year, we have a Dharma Conference somewhere in North America sponsored by one of the temples. In 2009, the Seattle Nichiren Buddhist Church will host the conference. This is usually held over a weekend and emphasizes academic and practical matters. Nichiren Shu Shumuin also sponsors a conference for future lay-leaders at Minobu-san in October. In addition to this conference, each temple and church sends out newsletters and Nichiren Shu News in English. They also provide their own web pages on the internet. Do you read these teaching materials? It may be hard for you to understand, but you will not know unless you try.

Finally, we need education for general members plus non-members. We held a week-long retreat in Houston last summer. The participants paid \$300 and 15 people participated. They thoroughly enjoyed themselves and are eager to do it again. This year, Rev. Ryuoh Faulconer will host the retreat.

In any event, NONA Headquarters will try to let you know a few months ahead of time, so please look for these announcements.

## **The Service at the St. Nichiren's Mausoleum**

By Rev. Shoda Douglas Kanai

The Nichiren Buddhist Kannon Temple of Nevada went to Minobu-san to show our respect to Nichiren Dai-Shonin on November 27, 2008. Before *Rinban Kyuji*, we did not think we could meet Abbot Nisso Uchino of the Kuonji Temple, the leader of all of Nichiren Shu. He was not feeling well because of a sudden drop in temperature a few days before. Amazingly, he was able to see us. He is an impressive man at 82 years old. He seemed very scholarly and doled out many advices to me.

*Rinban Kyuji* is a special service for our founder of Nichiren Buddhism entrusted by the Abbot. This was an experience that I cannot forget. There were two services, first at the *Haiden*, a worshiping hall for Nichiren Dai-Shonin, which was located in an upper level in one of the main halls. During the service, I kept thinking where was the *Gohonzon*? Then after the service, we went behind the altar, through a corridor and climbed up several steps to the room where Nichiren Dai-Shonin's ashes are kept. This is a very ornate room that is only open on special occasions. Not many people can see and experience such a wonderful sight. This was the *Gohonzon*.

The second service was held in the *Soshido*, Nichiren Dai-Shonin's Hall, where we could see St. Nichiren's statue. I remember looking into his eyes since they were very big. It seemed as if his spirit came out and touched me.

I am profoundly touched with this visit to Japan. Being able to see the Abbot, doing *Rinban Kyuji* and seeing Nichiren Dai-Shonin's face up close strengthened my faith and brought forth a better understanding of Nichiren Buddhism.

January/February 2009