

**BCC AGM CALGARY 2007**

**IMPROVING ACCESSIBILITY  
TO JODO SHINSHU BUDDHISM  
FOLLOW-UP DISCUSSION SESSION**



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## PURPOSE

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- To present a summary of the responses received to a questionnaire that was issued to the BCC temples, churches and fellowships, regarding:
  - Membership increase/decrease
  - Reasons for decline
  - Projects/activities undertaken
  - Suggested role for BCC's Living Dharma Centre
- To draw conclusions
- To make recommendations
- To propose next steps



## BACKGROUND

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- The Nishi Hongwanji, our main temple and the overseas districts, including BCA and BCC, have recognized the problem of declining membership.
- We need to address this most urgent of problems facing our temples and churches today.
- At the BCC AGM Toronto 2006, Ron Shimizu and myself presented a workshop entitled, 'Increasing Accessibility to Jodo Shinshu Workshop'. It produced a lot of discussion. There is a lot of concern.
- As a follow-up to that discussion, a temple questionnaire was sent out. The results are captured here in this follow-up presentation.



## RESPONSES RECEIVED

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- 13 of 17 temples/churches plus 1 fellowship responded to the questionnaire.
- This is considered a good response by most measures.
- Several of the temples/churches involved in an amalgamation did not respond. This is understandable given their situation.



## QUESTION #1

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- Are you experiencing a membership decline?  
[ 7 ] Yes [ 4 ] No
- If so, can you provide the estimated number of members, in this regard, over what period of time?  
[ 6 ] 0-5 members [ 1 ] 6-10 members over the past year
- One temple reported 9 new members in the past year
- The remaining temples reported status quo or a slight increase



## QUESTION #2

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- If you are experiencing a decline, are you actively pursuing addressing your membership decline?
- [ 9 ] Yes [ 2 ] No



## QUESTION #3

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- If you are experiencing a membership decline, what do you think are the reasons?
  1. Age: members passing away (most common)
  2. Demographics: younger generation not attending
  3. Unfavourable experience
  4. Inter-marriage
  5. Competition from other Buddhist sects
  6. Transfer of members out of province
  7. Low income
  8. Not willing to become members



## QUESTION #4

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If you are experiencing a decline, what activities/projects have you undertaken to address your membership decline? Please be specific. Have these activities/projects had measurable impact on your membership? What advice/lessons learned can you pass along to other churches/temples, with respect to the activity/project?

- Hospital and nursing home visits as a main task
- Funeral committee and service to members
- Various workshops: meditation, loving kindness, etc.
- Public speaking by Sensei on radio, at schools, etc.
- 'Green tea and munchies' after each Sunday service
- Designate members to sit and talk with new attendees
- Provide new attendees with a copy of the Jodo Shinshu Guide and BDK's The Teaching of Buddha
- Newspaper articles about Bhuddism and the temple
- Temple website
- Asking individuals to participate in temple activities: 'Women's Appreciation Day', 'Keirokai and Family Day', Dharma School



## QUESTION #4 (continued)

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- If you are experiencing a decline, what activities/projects have you undertaken to address your membership decline? Please be specific. Have these activities/projects had measurable impact on your membership? What advice/lessons learned can you pass along to other churches/temples, with respect to the activity/project?
  - Putting up posters around the city
  - Dharma school activities outside of the temple, e.g. annual camp
  - Outreach program
  - Chaplain offices at the university and community college
  - A membership committee
  - Shotsuki program
  - Host open houses twice a year
  - Local community involvement
  - Mochitsuki 'at no charge'
  - Spring and fall bazaars



## QUESTION #5

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- It has been suggested that in order to attract new members, current members need to better understand Jodo Shinshu Buddhism. What activities/projects have you undertaken to improve current member understanding of Jodo Shinshu Buddhism? Please be specific. What advice/lessons learned can you pass along to other churches/temples, with respect to the activity/project?
  - Showing DVD lecture series by Dr. Kenneth Tanaka to members
  - All services in English, including various chants and gathas
  - Sensei has workshops on Buddhism
  - Sensei's lectures are on the website
  - Make available English books on Jodo Shinshu at the temple



## QUESTION #6

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- What role do you think the BCC-LDC should play in leading/supporting you in addressing your membership decline and/or improving current member understanding of Jodo Shinshu Buddhism?
  - Provide consistent information across Canada for our members as well as non-members
  - Provide resources for the ministers and Dharma schools
  - Develop Dharma school curriculum
  - Organize special lectures at temples financed by LDC
  - Share ideas between temples and churches
  - Track progress on membership improvement and member JSB understanding in temples and churches
  - Organize/support national, regional and/or multi-temple initiatives and projects
  - Offer retreats for BCC members that are open to non-members for a fee
  - More communication from BCC and/or LDC, e.g. an LDC newsletter



## QUESTION #6 (continued)

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- What role do you think the BCC-LDC should play in leading/supporting you in addressing your membership decline and/or improving current member understanding of Jodo Shinshu Buddhism?
  - Provide downloadable lectures on the internet
  - Provide a Shin forum for questions and discussion on the internet
  - Provide downloadable chants and songs on the internet with the accompanying text
  - Lead development of a minister training program in Canada
  - Actively recruit Canadian born ministerial candidates



## QUESTION #7

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- What other roles/responsibilities do you see the BCC-LDC taking on that would directly support you?
  - LDC could videotape Japanese lectures, and make and distribute DVD's for Japanese-speaking members
  - Host workshop for Dharma school teachers
  - Have 'mail order' for religious items that members may want, e.g. religious texts, manuals, etc.
  - Provide a forum for lay leaders to ask questions and share ideas
  - Development of a website
  - Sponsoring lectures and visiting speakers
  - Implement a program similar to the Alpha Program put on by the Christians
  - A yearly visit of a member of the Board, where we would receive regular updates as to the progress of the Board itself



## QUESTION #7 (continued)

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- What other roles/responsibilities do you see the BCC-LDC taking on that would directly support you?
  - Provide a list and accessibility to books, pamphlets, audio books, DVD's, movies or documentary films in English that would be available to member temples
  - Be in charge of updating the BCC website on a monthly basis
  - Formation of a national monthly publication where all temples would be invited to contribute an article each month



# CONCLUSIONS

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- The membership concern is not universal: some temples have declining membership, others are in 'recovery' or thriving.
- The reasons for declines are primarily related to an aging membership and demographics (a common problem with religions in general).
- Most temples and churches are concerned and actively undertaking a variety of projects/activities that can be categorized into 3 groups:
  - Increasing member understanding of JSB
  - Building community within the current membership
  - Outreach to the public
- These groups can be matched to 3 objectives:
  - Increasing the number of 'committed' or 'core' members through deeper understanding of JSB
  - Initiating and implementing projects/initiatives relying on that community support and spirit
  - Attracting new members to the temple/church



## CONCLUSIONS (continued)

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- The projects/activities that are currently being carried out are many, innovative and are working.
- One challenge: Resources (people) to lead and support these projects/activities are needed.
- The LDC is looked at, as a means of facilitating and supporting these projects/activities at a national, regional and individual temple/church level. There is an emphasis on making multi-media materials available physically and over the internet, and providing speakers for lectures.



# STRATEGIC MODEL: 'THE SPIRAL'

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## ■ The Spiral





## A PROPOSED METHODOLOGY

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1. Communicate: these findings, successes, sharing projects/activities, materials
2. Enlist LDC leadership and support
3. Collaborate/implement/improve locally, regionally, nationally, and with other districts
4. Measure our progress (annual re-survey)
5. Go back to Step 1



## RECOMMENDATIONS

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- That the LDC via its national LDC Board develop its 2007/08 annual plan in response to the suggestions received from the temples/churches, summarized in this presentation, that specifies deliverables, target dates, resources and budget, to be submitted to the BCC and its member temples/churches, within a reasonable timeframe (June, 2007?).



## RECOMMENDATIONS (continued)

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- As part of this, recommend to the BCC and member temples/churches what changes should be **mandatory** or **optional**, in terms of practices, temple/church participation, governance, etc.
- Conduct a similar BCC temple/church survey in order to measure membership improvement, communicate success of projects and initiatives, and provide input to the BCC and the LDC in what should be addressed in the following year, to be completed in time for the BCC 2008 AGM.



## NEXT STEPS

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- Proceed with the recommendations, as outlined, with the agreement of the BCC and its member temples/churches.
- The Hamilton Buddhist Temple will volunteer to carry out a similar survey of the BCC temples/churches, in time for the BCC 2008 AGM.



## QUESTIONS

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questions?



## CONTACT

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