

Ohana Conference

It pleases me that I am able to join all of you today, for this Ohana Conference where you will be able share your opinions with others.

I have heard that the Hawaiian term, “ohana” extends beyond blood relationships, covering a wider range than the English word, “family” or the Japanese “kazoku.” I believe that this term expresses the important ideals that are needed for realizing a peaceful society.

In Japan today, large families have become fewer as nuclear families have increased and birth rates are on the decline. Although the nuclear family may have its benefits of being close-knit, this can also result in families becoming too independent and isolated, thereby being vulnerable when faced with issues outside of the inner family circle. It has also become the case where ties within the family have become excessively strong, and because of that, many serious problems are resulting. In Japan, the majority of murder cases being reported today are being caused by family members or relatives of the victim. I believe that we must nurture the concept of family as not being a system of segregation, but rather emphasize the importance of togetherness.

Also, in today’s society, human life has taken on the notions of being a personal belonging, or even a commodity. Amidst such notions, it is important that family ties be established based on the unconditional support of one another.

Going against traditional mainstream Buddhist practices, Shinran Shonin was married and raised a family. From a monastic point of view, family ties have been seen as being inconveniences filled with restraints. However, coming from a Jodo Shinshu perspective, the family is a place where we can all receive the Buddha’s compassion and realize the Buddha Dharma in this secular world.

As wars and destruction of the environment continues to progress, a political leader in Asia once stated that to seriously think about the future of mankind, it would be beneficial for everyone to come together in nurturing and rearing the children. Although it does not necessarily mean that we would directly educate the child, if we come see every child as being a part of our own family, I feel that we may come to view things differently. It is my hope that we can come to appreciate the compassion of the Buddha as it is said that, “All living beings are children of the Buddha.”

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OHTANI Koshin
Monshu
Jodo Shinshu Hongwanji-ha