

Comments on the Federation of Shin Buddhist Denominations
50th Anniversary Joint Declaration

**“For the realization of a world where every one of us can truly live together in mutual respect,
leaving no one behind”**

We, the Federation of Shin Buddhist Denominations, are an organization of ten Jōdo Shinshū denominations in Japan founded in 1969. Based on the teaching of Jōdo Shinshū, which was clarified by Shinran Shōnin, we are working together to address the problems and anxieties people are facing in the modern society. On the occasion of the 50th anniversary of our federation, we jointly issue the following declaration.

Article 1: We shall work toward the realization of a world where every one of us can truly live together in mutual respect, leaving no one behind.

Article 2: In order to achieve the above-mentioned objective, we, as a Shinshū sangha open to the international community, shall further promote the exchange of information and joint projects among participating denominations and develop a broad range of cooperative relationships with other organizations.

The Feeling of Isolation and Emptiness Permeating the Modern Society

Today’s society has been thrown into greater confusion politically and economically, and many people are perplexed by the uncertainty of the future. Because of the situation, people have come to give higher priority to self-reliance and self-responsibility over consideration for others in pursuit of their happiness. People left behind are simply disregarded. In such a society, we are often encouraged to place our interests above everything else at the expense of other people. What a harsh world we are living in!

However, we wonder if there is any peace of mind in such an egocentric way of life. If we just pursue our own egoistic interests, we will only end up in mutual distrust and isolation with no sympathetic relationships. In spite of the fact that all of us have a desire to overcome anxieties and have peace of mind, our egocentricity will isolate us from each other. At this point we might wonder about the meaning of our lives, but our mind will be filled with a feeling of emptiness. We think it is essential for us to set aside our egocentricity and find a way to live together with people in harmony in order to live our lives to the fullest with joy and happiness.

Shinran Shōnin’s View of Human Beings

What is meant by “blind desires” is our self-centered viewpoint and egocentric way of living. The Buddhist teaching tells us that because of the blind desires, we hurt one another, cause suffering to each other, and grieve over parting from our loved ones or the impermanence of our own lives, which

is described as birth, aging, illness, and death. At the same time, the teaching shows us the way to overcome our blind desires through which we can transcend the sufferings of birth and death.

Shinran Shōnin, the founder of Jōdo Shinshū, describes our true self as a being completely bound to blind desires by saying, “we, ordinary and unenlightened beings who are filled with blind desires.” Through the realization of himself as an ordinary, unenlightened being, Shinran Shōnin was awakened to the universality of the experiences of grief and suffering. And he shows us that our awareness of ourselves as the ordinary, unenlightened beings is the common ground for creating a society where all of us can truly accept each other as we are without making futile efforts to eliminate our blind desires. This viewpoint on human beings shown by Shinran Shōnin is particularly important in our modern society.

Humanity’s Major Issue

How can we live our lives with peace of mind? This might be a universal question for anyone regardless of the differences in social status, thought, or creed. It is not easy to find an answer to this question, but we just cannot avoid facing it. It is indispensable for us to share our thoughts beyond differences and boundaries to find an answer to this difficult question, without leaving anyone behind. Therefore, we believe that what is needed the most in this modern age is to restore humanity and harmony in our society so that we can freely share our thoughts, but not to rely on a small elite group of people. The basis of the restoration is our realization that we are all ordinary, unenlightened beings, who cannot escape from grief and suffering.

The restoration of humanity and harmony in our society is also important for each of our lives. When we rediscover each other through our shared experiences of grief and suffering, we can take a step forward toward building truly sympathetic relationships. Even when we are in the midst of suffering or isolation, sympathetic relationships will help us overcome those difficulties and appreciate our lives more deeply.

The Role of Shinshū Denominations

We, the followers of Shinran Shōnin’s teaching, make it a principle to live according to the Original Vow of Amida Buddha, a vow to take up all beings and leave none behind. Therefore, we believe it is our responsibility to face up to the question, “How can we live our lives with peace of mind?”

However, Buddhist priests are no longer considered to be the ones to whom people will turn for advice when they have troubles in everyday life or even fundamental problems related to birth, aging, illness, and death. We must seriously ponder if our funeral and memorial have truly served as a place where people feel comfortable to share their grief or struggles with us. We must also ask ourselves if we have lived up to our responsibility to respond to their struggles.

On this occasion, we have renewed our commitment as Buddhist priests to face up to people's sufferings and to create a society where we can truly live together. Therefore, we have set forth our object in the joint declaration as:

The realization of a world where every one of us can truly live together in mutual respect, leaving no one behind.

The year 2023 will mark the 850th anniversary of Shinran Shōnin's birth and the 800th anniversary of the establishment of Jōdo Shinshū. Having deeply reflected upon the 800-year history of our tradition, we have once again returned to the original spirit of the establishment of our federation and will work together toward the realization of a world where we can live together as one of the people of today who is struggling with many kinds of problems.