

Nichiren-shu calls for peace to honor war dead

Aug. 15, the day World War II ended in 1945, has special meaning to many Japanese people, with some returning to their hometowns to visit the tombs of ancestors who fought or died in the war. The day is also an opportunity for Japan to remind the world of the importance of peace.

The Nichiren-shu Buddhist sect, whose slogan is "Palms Together Toward All Lives," will hold a memorial service for the Japanese war dead enshrined at the Chidorigafuchi National Cemetery in Chiyoda Ward, Tokyo, near Tokyo Metro Kudanshita Station, from 9 a.m. to 10 a.m. on Aug. 15.

The cemetery has unidentified bones and other remains of about 360,000 Japanese soldiers and civilians who died during World War II, in Japan, other Asian countries and the Pacific islands, a major difference from the nearby Yasukuni Shrine, which only has lists of names of the war dead.

"It's not only about the commemoration of Japanese war dead," said Rev. Kanshin Mochida, manager of missionary planning for the Missionary Division of the head office of Nichiren-shu Buddhism. "The significance of Aug. 15 seems to have been fading. The war ended but the postwar era will continue. Let's continue the era and remember to continue the peace."

Anyone is welcome to the service, during which visitors listen to prayers by about 60 Nichiren-shu priests, including Chief Administrator Rev. Shobin Watanabe. It is rare for so many priests to be gathered in one place.

Also, to commemorate the dead, service participants will offer incense, a gesture to clean the body and spirit before praying. Visitors will be able to take some incense home as well.

The cemetery was founded in 1959 and Nichiren-shu has held an Aug. 15 service every year since then.

Last year, then Justice Minister Eisuke Mori attended the service. Roughly 400 people participate in the event every year.

The remains at the Chidorigafuchi National Cemetery have been gathered by the Japanese government, which began finding and recovering remains from Russia, Asian countries and the Pacific islands around 1952, when peace treaties between Japan and such countries took effect.

Emperor Showa offered an urn at the foundation of the cemetery. The urn contains remains that represent every buried war dead and is stored in a ceramic coffin at the center of the Hexagonal Hall of the cemetery.

The Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare is continuously trying to find remains



In memoriam: A priest from Nichiren-shu leads other priests from the Buddhist sect during a prayer service to commemorate the Japanese war dead at Chidorigafuchi National Cemetery in Tokyo.

of Japanese war dead in foreign battlefields in collaboration with countries in the region. There are 3.1 million confirmed Japanese war dead from World War II.

When the ministry finds remains it can identify, it sends them to the families. But if remains are unidentified, it sends them to the Chidorigafuchi National Cemetery, where they are buried.

The cemetery has buried 3,937 remains this year, more than the total buried in 2008 (629) and 2009 (1,406) combined, according to the ministry's Social Welfare and War Victims' Relief Bureau.

Of the 360,000 remains buried at the cemetery, about 12,000 were found in Japan; 76,000 were in China and Taiwan; 113,000 were in Pacific island nations including Papua New Guinea; 36,000 in Myanmar, Thailand and Indonesia; 100,000 in the Philippines; 10,000 in Russia; 483 in the Korean Peninsula; and the rest in other regions, according to the bureau.

The cemetery is within walking distance from Nippon Budokan, which will hold an event to commemorate the war dead for an hour starting at 11:51 a.m., attended by Emperor Akihito, Empress Michiko and Prime Minister Naoto Kan, among others.

Nichiren-shu is a branch of Buddhism based on the teachings of the 13th century Japanese monk Nichiren. It believes the Lotus Sutra represents the perfect culmination of the true teaching of the Buddha and Nichiren worked tirelessly to spread

this message throughout Japan despite the opposition of the country's established Buddhist sects.

Nichiren was born Feb. 16, 1222, in Kominato, in what is now Chiba Prefecture. When he was 11, his parents sent him to the nearby Seicho-ji Temple, then associated with the esoteric Buddhism of the Tendai sect, to study. He displayed early promise but was puzzled why there were so many different schools of Buddhism.

Despite his doubts, Nichiren was ordained as a Buddhist priest at the comparatively young age of 15. He eventually reached the conclusion that the Lotus Sutra encapsulated the essence of the Buddha's message, which set the stage for his career as one of the greatest religious reformers in Japanese history.



Palms Together toward All Lives

NICHIREN-SHU

Each year on Aug. 15, the anniversary of the end of World War II in 1945, the Nichiren-shu Buddhist sect holds a memorial service for the Japanese war dead at the Chidorigafuchi National Cemetery in Tokyo. Anyone is welcome to the service, so please drop by.

Date and Time: Aug. 15, 2010, 9 a.m. - 10 a.m.

Venue: Chidorigafuchi National Cemetery, Chiyoda Ward, Tokyo

For details, see the accompanying article.



日蓮宗

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