



Kibimai on New Year's day at the Headquarters

# Thanks for the Life I was Given

By The Reverend Toshimasa Okanari, Chief Administrative Director of Konkokyo



“Happy New Year,” everyone! I am truly happy to share the new year of 2014 with you.

In Konkokyo, this year we are celebrating the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary since the Founder, Konko Daijin was born. This makes it a very blessed year.

Since my childhood, my father and mother, who are both Konko ministers, used to tell me, “You were born through Kami’s divine blessings.” I was also told that during my birth, I was such a difficult delivery because I did not cry and did not begin breathing right away. The doctor tried everything possible to help me start breathing until he finally gave up and went home. Nevertheless, someone came to help my parents by keeping me warm while they desperately prayed to Kami. Suddenly I began to mewl.

Based on this outcome, my parents would repeatedly remind me, “You were given life just as I told you... You were born receiving a divine blessing.”

At present, I am blessed with three children. Many things occurred when they were born. I realized that birth is a wondrous thing, and a person is allowed to be born by means of a great force beyond human power.

It is not necessarily true that only a person who believes in Kami is born through divine blessings. We are taught by

Konko Daijin that all people who live between Heaven and Earth are born through Kami’s blessing. All people in the world are born receiving the blessings of Heaven and Earth equally, due to the divine workings of Heaven and Earth.

When we are faced with a hardship in life, we tend to believe we are going through it all alone. Before thinking in this way, try to become aware of the precious gift of life that you were given. The life you were given is a divine blessing and everyday will start as soon as you wake up in the morning. Both pleasant and sorrowful things happen in daily life.

First thing in the morning, with a grateful heart, let us say, “Thank you, Kami-Sama for allowing me to wake up.”

Let us each live our lives thanking Kami for everything that occurs everyday. An accumulation of “thanks” will certainly develop your fruitful life.

We were born through the divine workings of Heaven and Earth. Furthermore, we have been waking up every morning receiving these divine workings for a couple of years or many, many years. We should grasp this truth wholeheartedly, and not take waking up in the morning for granted. Instead, we should give thanks for this blessing.

As I receive and accumulate the gift of life each day, I wish this year more sacred.

## From Kyoten



For faith daily renewal is most important. Live each day with the same happy heart you have on New Year’s Day. When the sun sets, think that it is the last day of the year. When the sun rises, think that it is New Year’s Day. If you are happy every day, there will be no discord in the family. (GORIKAI III KONKO KYOSO GORIKAI 35)



## Overseas Believers Exchange Gathering Held on the 130th Anniversary of Our Founder's Passing



From October 2 to 3, 2013, the Foreign Believers Gathering on the occasion of the 130<sup>th</sup> Anniversary for Founder's Passing was held at Konkokyo Headquarters. 63 participants from continental North America, Hawaii, Brazil, and Korea attended.

At the opening of the gathering, Reverend Kaneo Kondo, Director of the Outreach Department II, received Toritsugi Mediation from Konko-Sama on behalf of all participants. Following that, "The Divine Reminder" was recited in each participant's language.

Afterwards, Reverend Shozo Yamamoto, Director of the Outreach Department I, gave a lecture titled "Let us awaken to Kami's blessings" at the main conference room at Konkokyo Headquarters' Administrative Offices. Reverend Yamamoto, talking about the illnesses which his family members

and his acquaintances had experienced, explained that it is important for us to awaken to Kami's blessings in our everyday lives, which we often do not notice, and once we are aware of these blessings, it is also important to move on to the next step and live a life of gratitude and happiness. After the speech, Reverend Yamamoto answered the participants' questions.

In the evening, after every participant observed Konko-Sama's procession from the Main Worship Hall, they went to Yatsunami Hall. After Chief Administrative Director Reverend Toshimasa Okanari's welcome, a meeting for staff members of Konkokyo Headquarters and the participants of the gathering was held. During the cordial meeting, everyone deepened their relationships with each other through informal chats.

On the second day, the participants welcomed Konko-Sama's procession to the Main Worship Hall in the morning, and then offered morning prayers. Afterwards, Reverend Okanari gave a speech and some memorial pictures were taken.

Reverend Tateo Suenaga, Head Minister of Konko Church of Birigui, Brazil, offered a lecture titled "Seeking the Heart of the Universe." He explained one of the fourth Konko-Sama's teachings shared very late in his life. Konko-Sama said that it is very important to practice faith based on gratitude, and it is especially important "to express gratitude for everything that helps you." After the lecture, all the participants attended the Grand Service for the 130<sup>th</sup> Anniversary for Founder's Passing. This concluded the memorable and eventful two-day gathering.

### VOICES FROM PARTICIPANTS



**By Reverend Chieko Iwai,  
Konko Church of Sao Paulo  
from Brasil**

At the 130<sup>th</sup> memorial anniversary of the Founder's passing, I was blessed with the opportunity to experience the start of a new stage of the Konko Faith. Believers in North America, Brazil, Hawaii, and Korea are now trying to embody Founder's teachings in the most applicable way for their respective area, which is what the Founder had wished: "I am aspiring for a blessing which will completely embrace the world with this Faith." The gathering made me realize that my role or daily "goyo" is to fulfill my part in realizing the Founder's wish. The Founder revealed

exactly what the Way is by practicing them, and then the fifth Konko-Sama explained the Way as "the Way of Kami and People", and committed one wish to all ministers and believers: "I wholeheartedly pray to serve in the realization of 'the Way of Kami and People' where both Kami and humanity are fulfilled through interdependent (*Aiyo kakeyo*) relationship in each individual's life." To seek fulfillment based on gratitude for one's daily life can be accomplished through each person's practice regardless of race or nationality.

The gathering enabled me to communicate with the believers from each country and I felt greatly encouraged about continuing my daily goyo. I truly wish to help spread this wonderful Way.

## VOICES FROM PARTICIPANTS



### By Mr. John Tamashiro, Konko Mission of Waipahu from Hawaii

The Konko Workshop, held on October 2 at the main conference room at Konkokyo Headquarters' Administrative Offices, was a highlight of my trip for three reasons: the relevance of its topic to senior believers; the inspirational message of service and *Aiyo kakeyo*; as well as the stimulation of thought on important issues.

As a topic, caregiving for elders was particularly appropriate for senior believers, not only because it has become a common experience, but also because it relates to the commemoration theme about Founder's final days.

Reverend Yamamoto and his assistants inspirationally presented information about elder care using oral and written English. Although caregiving can be a very tiring responsibility,

the ministers showcased the exemplary behavior of both caregivers and their dependents. The former overcame their discouragement by embracing the benevolent Kami within themselves and their charges. For example, a loyal wife, aware of Kami through earnest prayer, learned to revere the divine energy pulsing through her enfeebled husband. In a second example, a kind husband patiently complied with the wishes of his friendly wife, beset with Alzheimer's disease, to create affectionate relationships that included strangers and Konko believers (*Kami and People*, p.2)

After the Reverend Yamamoto's lecture, a lively discussion broadened concern for provider care to raise issues about living wills and end of life decisions. Furthermore, the discussion stimulated my interest in Founder's last 100 days.

I realized that this workshop not only provided me with important information about elderly care and care providers, but also strengthened my understanding of Konko beliefs.



### By Ms. Vivian Spies, Konko Church of San Diego from USA

was just as special.

During the Overseas Believers Exchange Gathering, I was able to meet people from different countries for the first time. To hear *the Tenchi Kakitsuke*, not only in Japanese and English but in Portuguese and Korean as well, was inspiring. I enjoyed the lectures and learning about how other people's faith developed. While the lectures were interesting, the best part of the event was meeting new people and reconnecting

I remember when I first visited Hombu many years ago. I was very excited to be able to visit and explore the whole area.

I haven't had the chance to go back and retrace my steps from the first visit, but my trip last October

with others, especially during dinner. The group from Hawaii organized a great entertainment show for us.

Normally I don't like waking up before 3 AM but the next morning, I energetically got up to welcome Konko Sama's procession to the Main Worship Hall. This was followed by prayers and Toritsugi Mediation. All of this took place before 5 AM!

Later that day we attended the Grand Service. Even though this wasn't the first time I attended the Grand Service, I was still able to learn something new. Being with others that share the same faith as I do made this occasion even more special. I thank everyone including our hosts for putting everything together for us, as well as the attendees who not only shared their experiences but their enthusiasm as well.



### By Reverend Jin Koo Lee, Konkokyo of Korea

Kinya Suenaga and I, who are ministers at the Konkokyo of Korea, went to take part in the service.

Since this year is a commemorative year, there was a gathering held for ministers and believers from around the world. At the gathering, I could share the great joy with other foreign believers. There was a presentation on how believers should begin to practice Faith, how to live a truly single-hearted faith life and achieve the Founder's aspiration

I am grateful for having the opportunity to attend the Grand Service for the 130<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Founder's Passing,

which was held at the Konkokyo Headquarters on October 3, 2013. Reverend

to spread his way of life to the people around us. After the gathering, we had an informal session, where I had a chance to communicate with many people. It was a precious moment and I felt very grateful for it. However, the absence of a Japanese-Korean interpreter was most unfortunate, in limiting the understanding of the presentation.

It was a good idea to hold a meeting such as this in a memorial year, where we can find out what it is to live a faithful life. Therefore, I would like to express appreciation to the ministers of the Outreach Department II for their sponsorship, the ministers from Konkokyo International Center who made arrangements for this opportunity, and the other ministers who took part in the service.



**New York Area Konko Faith Connections, October 24-27, 2013**

Reported by Reverend Joanne Tolosa, the Head Minister of Konko Church of San Francisco

**M**y recent trip to the New York area to conduct individual Mediation, informal and formal faith gatherings spanned four days. Thursday night October 24, I met with a believer who I see on a regular basis when I go to New York semi-annually. This was the only night she could meet.

As a mother, myself, I have a lot in common with the parents of four of the New York families. Sharing and discussing teachings about our Divine Parent, and we as children of the Divine Parent, as well as the common theme of child-rearing in our faith conversations.

Friday afternoon, I conducted the usual informal, drop-in faith gathering at a local coffee shop. Five of us adults met, along with a 10-month old baby born to Kazutoshi and Aiko Kodera. This year Alessandro Altman returned to the gathering, after being in Europe for six months as a foreign exchange student and senior at New York University. Two brand new people joined our meeting, after their Japan relatives told them about these gatherings announced in the Konko Shimbun. It was amazing to see them both exchange surprised looks with each other, because they both knew each other, but did not know each was a Konko believer! For about three years, one of them was working across the street from our meeting place! We were oblivious of each other until now. We were grateful for this divine arrangement.

As newcomers, both young men asked the common questions such as "Is there a Konko church in New York?" and "If there is an English Konko Prayer book, how can I obtain one?" There is no formal Konko church currently New York, but Ms. Saomi Okamoto (Konko Church of Mito, Japan) usually conducts a monthly study group in New York about



Konko concepts and teachings. I also let them know I continue to be available for Toritsugi Mediation long distance, in San Francisco and that I return twice a year to conduct these important gatherings. One of the purposes of these informal social gatherings is for Konko believers in New York to find each other and hopefully form a natural social support group.

On Saturday, October 26, I conducted a formal 130<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebration of the Founder's Passing and Iki-gami Konko Daijin Grand Ceremony. The congregation was made up of two families with young children, in the home of Michiko (Terasaki) & Michael Chung. The Chung Family have graciously hosted these prayer services several times.

This intimate living room setting made it difficult to ignore the cries of a baby seeking breast milk. I was intensely aware of the blessings we are allowed to receive through our Divine Parent's blessings when I heard the hunger cries of this young child. Whether a small home setting or a church setting with fairly large size Konko altars (as my home church of San Francisco), the sincerity and meaningfulness of these service are no different. Everyone offered flowers in lieu of sacred evergreen branches (*Tamagushi*). After we sang "A Shining, Shimmering Light/Path" and I concluded my sermon, we shared delicious Chinese takeout in the dining room. Even though it just happens twice a year, these families and the believers who are single look forward to sharing their Konko faith and their lives with each other on my next visit from the West Coast to the East Coast this coming March 20 to 22, 2014. As Aiko Kodera stated, "These gatherings are a place where I can openly share my heart" and "It is a place our Divine Parent Kami allows us to meet and connect with each other."

**"KAMI and PEOPLE" Booklet Recently Published**

**T**his booklet includes relatable faith stories by believers which are based on the theme of Konkokyo's Faith Movement, "Let Us Live a Mutually Fulfilled Life with Kami."

English, Korean, Portuguese, and Spanish versions are available now. If you are interested, please contact us at the Konkokyo International Center!



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