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Rev. Yamada delivering a sermon in London, UK

Konkokyo Faith Gatherings Held in Britain and Germany

To support local Konkokyo believers and spread our Way among potential believers, the Konkokyo International Center (KIC) has been holding faith gatherings in areas where there are no Konko churches. This year, Reverend Shinji Yamada, the Director of KIC and staff member Reverend Nobuhiro Kusuki went to Britain and Germany from July 14 to 25 to hold faith meetings.

In London they had a gathering on July 17 at the Imperial Hotel, and in Berlin, gatherings on both July 23 and 24 at the Thang Long Hotel. Each gathering included a service, a sermon, faith talks and discussions. In London, Reverend Yamada officiated the service in Japanese and English; in Berlin, resident minister Reverend Kiyoko Furumoto officiated in Japanese and German. In his sermon following these services, Reverend Yamada reported on the damages from the Great East Japan Earthquake and restoration efforts. He said, "Through this catastrophic disaster and the survivors themselves, we have learned important lessons: to have humble reverence toward heaven and earth, to appreciate

that which is given by Kami even in the midst of sorrowful circumstances, and to live life helping one another as Kami's children." Afterwards, participants had informal discussions and enjoyed drawing random Konkokyo teachings written on strips of paper. Some comments made by participants about the faith meeting were: "I was grateful that I could pray together with other participants," "I felt at peace adding my own personal silent prayer," "The sermon was very interesting," and so forth. Others gave their impressions about the congregation, such as: "I enjoyed meeting Konkokyo believers," and "I found all the participants to have a nice disposition." At this year's gatherings, *Toritsugi* Mediation Cards were distributed among the participants prior to the service. The cards with each person's wishes were collected and offered at the altar, as they jointly prayed to Kami.

There are some who became Konkokyo believers after they had participated in the faith gathering. One such person happily reported her experience, saying, "I fell off a ladder during house renovations. My life was spared and I incurred a minor injury. I felt that I lived under Kami's protection."

Before and after the day's gathering in London, Reverends Yamada and Kusuki had separate talks with local people seeking faith and held a mini gathering at a believer's home. In Berlin, together with Reverend Furumoto and her husband, they visited a religion research institute, observed and joined the activities supporting the homeless. They also offered the "Prayer for Peace" at a Christian church built upon land where the Berlin Wall once stood, as well as at a holocaust memorial cenotaph.



The informal discussions with participants in Berlin, Germany

Walk Together for Reconstruction

Since the Great East Japan Earthquake happened, Konkokyo Headquarters has been collecting donations for Japan's reconstruction and working with the entire congregation to pray for recovery. Various Konkokyo activity groups have also been asking people to participate in the reconstruction work and are still continuing to send volunteers and staff to affected areas. Many volunteers from all over Japan have joined these efforts. In addition to the Japanese volunteers, Mr. Miguel Solano-Romagosa from Costa Rica, also participated in the activities and stayed at the Konko

Church of Kesennuma. (See "Voice from Volunteer" below)

At the Konkokyo Peace Gatherings held in various parts of Japan, many participants prayed for those who were affected and renewed their wish for reconstruction. Reverend Shiro Okuhara, Head Minister of Konko Church of Kesennuma in Miyagi Prefecture, was invited to make a speech at 29th Tokyo Peace Gathering on July 17. Because his church is located on a hill, it was barely saved since the tsunami came up below the church. The church offers part of its facility as a base of operations for the Konkokyo Tokyo Metropolitan

Supporting Organization for Volunteers of Disaster. Reverend Okuhara shared his experience and belief with the audience. (See "The ways of Kami are mysterious..." below)

Half a year has passed since the disaster, and now, the aim of volunteer activities has changed from emergency relief assistance to reconstruction of lives.

We hope that our prayers and support will reach the people who are still struggling from various difficult situations, such as those who lost their jobs because their workplace was affected.

Voice from Volunteer

Mr. Miguel Solano-Romagosa
from Costa Rica

I started my volunteer work in Kesennuma on July 20 and finished on July 30. I was sad to leave such a special place of such nice and friendly people. The experience in Kesennuma changed my life in that I appreciate work more than I used to and now I can really understand how important it is to help others. I was truly touched, observing the way Japanese people face the difficult conditions. Even if the circumstances are very challenging, the Japanese always work hard, with a

lot of spirit to do their best!

If I have another chance to return to Japan, I will definitely visit Kesennuma again, a place where I learned many valuable things for my everyday life!

I thank all the people who were with me during those days. I appreciate all the help and the experiences we shared together. Kesennuma and the people I met there will always be in my heart as a very special memory of hard work, the development of personal understanding, and friendship!

Thank you, Kesennuma! We will meet again!



"The ways of Kami are mysterious and wondrous beyond our understanding"

Reverend Shiro Okuhara,
Head Minister of Konko Church of Kesennuma

I believe that the most important thing is to devote myself for the others, especially when we are in a difficult situation. Since the disaster, the Kesennuma Church has been tested whether it is helpful for public welfare or not.

Just after the disaster happened, the Kesennuma Church sheltered approximately thirty people in the worship hall; so, during daily worship, I always did silent prayers to avoid disturbing these people. However soon after, some of them started to clap in their beds, and others came to join the services. I was overjoyed to know that they accepted our prayers

and sincerity.

Today, each of volunteer activities of Konkokyo is working very well. These include the actual practice of faith which embodies the works of Kami with prayers, conversations, and actions.

Immediately after the disaster, I used to want to ask Kami, "Why did this tragedy happen?" But as time passed, my own thought has gradually changed, and I began to think that disaster is a natural phenomenon beyond our understanding, and Kami also might have no way to stop it.

"The ways of Kami are mysterious and wondrous beyond our understanding." All I can do now is to accept everything which has happened as is, and to pray for a revival from now on.



D People



Engaging prayer and action in volunteer activities

Mr. Masato Tanaka
Reported by KIC

end of the day, the church's minister received news that a volunteer center in Kesenuma City (Miyagi Prefecture) needed people who could stay a long time and Masato was asked to work there; an answer to his request! This fateful timing made him strongly feel the workings of Kami and *Toritsugi* Mediation.

Masato conducted volunteer activities for about three months starting in April. At first, he cleared sludge, sorted supplies, and was a receptionist before working to coordinate affected people with other volunteers. Finally, he was active in a local support group which handled evacuation centers, temporary housing, and people living in homes within the affected district. On July 14, he finished his one hundred day stay and returned to Tokyo. When asked about what he learned, he said, "Volunteer staff are not leaders ordering others around. It is important to

"**K**ami is telling me to go to the Tohoku District." Masato Tanaka was sure of that when his boarding on the luxury liner Ocean Princess was cancelled after the devastating 9.0 magnitude earthquake and destructive tsunami in the Tohoku District on March 11.

Masato was a fitness director and personal trainer on the cruise ship, but was on leave at home in Tokyo when the earthquake happened. He was so shocked when he watched the media reports of the affected areas that he immediately looked to join volunteer activities there. However, the more he researched it, the more difficult he found it to participate in those areas.

"Let me go to the Tohoku District," he asked during *Toritsugi* Mediation at church one day. Surprisingly, within the

have consideration and sympathy for the situation of those affected by this disaster." He also said, "Our Founder told us to help when we find a person who has difficulties instead

of Kami. I think that faith is not only praying but also is created through our actions. If there are those who have suffering, I would like to help them by using both."

In early August, Masato returned to the disaster areas again to contribute more to relief efforts and said, "I would like to take action to make a



He entertained children by performance

world surrounded by *Aiyo Kakeyo*, where people cooperate with one another, live as human beings, and brighten precious lives."

He is expected his vigorous support at disaster areas. He is looking forward to helping as much as he can there.

New Intern Welcomed !!

The KIC Internship Program started on July 1 when our staff gave a warm welcome to Reverend Masafumi Kimoto. He shared some of his thoughts for his stay with us:

"I think one of the very important tasks for KIC is to connect Konkokyo Headquarters with Konkokyo Churches worldwide. Another related one is to let people in other countries know about the Konko Faith. As this is concerned, KIC's activities are important in sharing our faith. What I'm interested in is the possibility of bringing positive aspects of other religions to Konkokyo, especially

relating to propagation.

Unfortunately, the reputation of religion is not quite good in Japan now. I have heard that having a personal religion is very important for making good relationships with others in the US. Sometimes, those who don't have their own religion can't get confidence from others. I want to study how religions in other countries work within modern society from the viewpoint of KIC."



Round Table Discussion in 2011

On Wednesday, June 29, the Konkokyo International Center held a Round Table Discussion on the theme: "Concepts of 'Religion' and 'Secularity' and Konkokyo —Approaching Essential Matters of the Modern World." Mr. Keishi Nakamura (translator/editor) was engaged as a lecturer. Through his lecture, Mr. Nakamura reconsidered the concepts of "Religion" and "Secularity" by using a concept of "Discipline" based on the

work of Dr. Talal Asad (a cultural anthropologist) and his writings clarifying the issues of "Religion" in this modern world. Mr. Nakamura provided the attendees with three questions for the round table discussion: "How does Konkokyo make logical explanations about 'Discipline'?" "How are Konkokyo teachings universal and different



from other religions?"; and "What kinds of impact does Konkokyo make on the 'excesses' of a secular society?"

Ministers' Children's Experience in the Philippines

Konkokyo Headquarters held an annual meeting for ministers' children from August 15 to 20. Usually held at Konkokyo Headquarters, this year's meeting was held in the Philippines. There, the children participated in a study tour, which was designed to give them firsthand experience in seeing how people are suffering in the world. This new awareness is an important step in their developing compassion for those who face daily hardships in their lives.

On one of the tours, the children



visited the SRD Konkokyo Center, which is supported by the Konkokyo Peace Activity Center, and other organizations, which provide educational and psychological support for abandoned children. They also cooked curry

and took the nourishing meals to feed the people living at the Payatus dumpsite. Afterwards, one of the participants said, "I was shocked when I visited the dumpsite. The experience made me realize that people around the world face many problems. I realize how blessed we are to have a house to live in, a family that care for us and to be able to eat three meals a day. From this day on, I will live my life never forgetting how precious and grateful it is to be able to live as we do every day."

Konko Gakuen High School student introduces *Bitchu-Kagura* in Australia

Seventeen-year-old Nozomu Yamada, a student of Konko Gakuen High School* played the *Bitchu-Kagura*, (the sacred music and dance performed during festive events at Japanese shrines) at the Rain Forest Station in Kuranda of Cairns during a school excursion.

Mr. Yamada had proposed this plan based on his desire to show the art of his native home district to the Australian people. The result was the realization of a cultural exchange between the *Bitchu-Kagura* and the Aborigines' dance.

By the end of his performance, two hundred people in the audience, including Aborigines, were gradually drawn to his brave dance, and heartily applauded, saying it was "wonderful!"

Mr. Yamada said, "I am very proud that the *Kagura* was being applauded by so many people despite the difference of countries. I wish to continue playing the *Kagura* in the future."

As he danced the *Kagura* with pride in a foreign country, it seems other students felt respect for him and realized how splendid it is to have such

Just Released!

The animated DVD,
Konko-Sama
-Tales of Toritsugi Mediation 2

*Two episodes *30 minutes

*English and Japanese dubbed
versions with subtitles available

For further information,
please contact KIC!

self-confidence.

*Konko Gakuen High School is a private junior and senior high school established in Okayama Prefecture based on the teachings of Konko Faith.



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