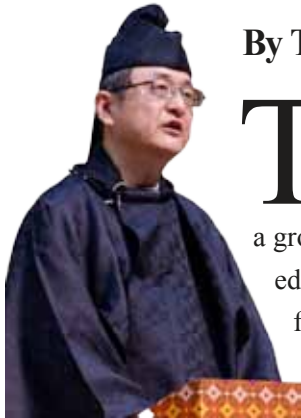


# Reaching Our 70<sup>th</sup> Anniversary

By The Reverend Toshimasa Okanari, Chief Administrative Director of Konkokyo



This year marks 70 years since the end of World War II. During this time, Japan has developed a growing economy that we acknowledge is the result of everyone's efforts and prayers, based on a deep regret for the countless sacrifices suffered as a result of war.

Although we have continuously received wealth and prosperity and our society has been human- and economy-centered, some conditions have been barely livable for many powerless people. As we reflect on this, we need to consider the importance of mindfulness for the Universe and the importance of human relationships in which we all help each other. We may be losing this essential concept. In addition, looking at the world situation, we observe environmental demolition, economic gaps, disregard of human life, and opposition between nations and tribes, all resulting in people still hurting and killing each other even now.

Faced with such a hard reality, I pray for the realization of a peaceful world, in which people and nations can be saved and helped through our collective and mutual efforts every day. Furthermore, I cannot help praying that I will be one who creates peace. That is why I feel happy when I see people who respect and value relationships with and among people around them. I am immensely moved when I see people trying to help others, or working to settle the problems they face. I strongly believe the foundation that makes human "human" must be the family.

There is a teaching as follows in the Konko Daijin's teachings:

*A person with many children expressed his worry over their different personalities. Konko-Sama imparted, "If the five fingers on your hand were all the same length, you wouldn't be able to grasp anything. Your hand has fingers of different lengths, thus you are able to grasp. Because of their different personalities, your children will be useful."*

A child who is taught "Because of your difference, you will be useful" believes that he is accepted, and this belief gives him a power to live. As this feeling empowers the actualization of this belief, it becomes a foundation for this person to develop into one who plays a greater role in society. This foundation also nurtures a heart that respects other people. In a larger view, the perspective of "Because of your difference, you will be useful" contributes to peaceful relationships among nations.

Everybody has been given the power to help people. If a person helps another, both lives will shine. Because all humanity is allowed to live in the Universe and is given Kami's heart, everything has potential to grow through the Divine Parent of the Universe. As Konko Daijin taught, all of humanity is Kami's children.

If each family tries sincerely to live as "Kami's children," each family member will potentially be a valued contributor to world peace. I pray from bottom of my heart that this will be a year in which each one of us contributes to world peace.

# Faith Enrichment Meeting in Konko Held by the Konko Missions in Hawaii



Reverend Hiroshi Takebe

*Celebrating the 200<sup>th</sup> Birthday of our Founder, the Konko Missions in Hawaii held the Faith Enrichment Meeting in Konko, Japan from October 20 to October 24, 2014. This year's theme was "The Way of Kami and People." The objectives of this meeting were to learn about Konko Daijin's faith and how this faith came to Hawaii through disciples and ministers.*

*Following the opening prayer service, the attendees cleaned the premises. Reverend Hiroshi Takebe (Director of the Konkokyo Research Institute) and Reverend Kiyoji Konko (Deputy Director of Worship Hall Affairs) were the speakers for this gathering.*

*The attendees also visited the Founder's historical sites including his birth place and disciple's churches. Thirteen members from Hawaii were rejuvenated with the atmosphere in Konko.*

*At the meeting, Reverend Hiroshi Takebe lectured as follows;*

*Konko Daijin Oboegaki (Konko Daijin's Memoirs) begins with the Founder's personal details, such as his birth date, birthplace, parents' names, gender, number of siblings, birth order, etc.*

We live without knowing why we were born and our purpose for living. Throughout our lifetime we are unknowingly receiving Divine Blessings and the ultimate example of this is the blessing of life itself. It is important to realize Kami's existence as the source of all life.

Our Founder was faced with the difficult task of digging seven graves. At the age of 42, after experiencing seven deaths, he became gravely ill. The doctors gave up all hope for his recovery. In this situation, he was able to hear Kami's message, which was, "In the past, Bunji (the Founder) committed irreverences to Kami during the construction on his new house." The Founder's father-in-law then protested, saying, "Bunji checked the 'Directions' prior to construction." However, Kami responded, "If you insist that Bunji checked the directions and did not offend Kami,



Toritsugi Madiation at the Main Worship Hall



Prayer at the Main Worship Hall



Reverend Kiyoji Konko's Lecture

then you do not care whether he and his family lives or not?"

For Kami to pose the question, "Is it enough to only check the 'Days & Directions?'" means Kami created a breakthrough regarding Kami's own image, which people believed, at the time, to be Konjin, a roaming deity that curses people with seven deaths in their families.

The Founder must have felt Kami's meaning and apologized by saying "Due to my primal ignorance, I did not know which direction I was irreverent to. My attitude may have incurred great displeasure, but since I am an ordinary man, I realize my best is not enough and therefore offer my sincere apology."

Kami responded, "You are correct" and saved him.

I think this is the most dramatic story within the sacred scriptures, as an example whereby this way of faith was realized through a dispute between Kami and people.

Our Founder wrote in detail about this occurrence, as follows, "As I write up to this point, I am filled with deep emotion." He could not find the exact word to express his great awe and gratitude, so he used the symbol "○" instead.

Kami then interjected, saying with deep emotion, “Konko Daijin, these deep emotions are not only your own. If I, Tenchi Kane No Kami, were a poet, I would express these emotions through poetry. However, I am incapable of doing so. I am overjoyed, and even overcome with emotion to see how people have been able to be saved and how Kami has been able to be realized.”

Continuing on...It is written that Kami was already attentive to the Founder before his grave illness.

Our Founder visited Kibitsu Shrine to pray to overcome misfortunes due to his “unlucky” age (*according to Japanese custom.*)

Kibitsu Shrine was well known for engaging in “Odoji,” a fortune-telling ritual in which one’s fortune is judged by a sound emitted from a huge kettle. It is said that if the kettle makes sounds, it is a good sign; if not, then it is a bad sign. In the Founder’s case, two sounds came out. Kami told him, “That was my warning to you about your illness.”

And Kami continued, “This time, you were to have succumbed to a fever. However, since the fever would have been fatal, I changed it to a throat ailment.”

On New Year’s Day, the Founder prayed to overcome all misfortunes. Even prior to this, he had sincere and conscientious faith in Kami. Kami accepted his requests and changed his fever to just a throat ailment. Kami had prepared for this in advance, as the fever would have been fatal.

Whether one is saved or not from a fatal situation, depends upon the communication interchange between Kami and people.

Even beyond Kami making Di-



the Founder's Birth Place



Konko-Sama's Procession from the Main Worship Hall.



Saiso Sacred Cleaning



Prayer at the Founder's Grave Site



The Founder's Mediation Hall

vine Arrangements ahead of time, the outcome depends upon what people do, how they do things, and what direction their hearts are facing.

This is the origin of the “Let Us Live the Way of Kami and people” movement, which is now being carried out by the Konkokyo Organization.

In the *Konko Daijin Memoirs* that Kami requested the Founder to write, both Kami and the Founder looked back upon what led up to both Kami and people being saved.

Two years before the Founder’s passing, his grandson passed away. Although, his grandson was cheerfully playing in the worship hall, sadly, he passed away the next day. A few days later, the Founder received Kami’s teaching, “Your grandson died in place of his father.”

Though tragic, even in this situation, Kami’s Divine Arrangement was at work! Kami taught us that the passing of the Founder’s grandson’s was part of this arrangement. To continue, later on this teaching was written after this event, “People will begin to talk about how great Kami’s blessings are. Look forward to the future.”

Even though the Founder was taught the reason why his grandson passed on, I doubt that it gave him much comfort. But Kami predicted that the Founder would come to understand this Divine Arrangement and would eventually accept it with a grateful heart.

I think that through this experience, the Founder was guided to understand, from the bottom of his heart, “How great Kami’s blessings are.” His strong belief and understanding of Kami’s blessings is at the very foundation of his faith. He re-



confirmed it through countless events, over and over again, and his faith had carried him throughout his lifetime. It was evident at the time of his grave illness at age 42, as well.

Later on, not only the Founder, but also his family members and followers began receiving Divine Blessings. Through such occurrences, he was continuously made aware of “How great Kami’s blessings are.”

Even if we intend to see and understand everything, there are some things we actually can only understand through touch.

Needless to say, in terms of Kami, there is no one who can see Kami’s entirety.

Understanding how great Kami’s blessings are, we are taught to look with anticipation about the future. We say “Look forward to the future” but we don’t know “when” the “future” is. Even in times of difficulty, people can be saved. Even during hardships, people can look with anticipation towards the future.

The words “Divine Time” and “patience” are Konkokyo terms which mean “Let’s spend time together with Kami.”

During a sermon, Reverend Masumi Degawa shared, “I was told that



Welcome Party

somebody’s senior minister is aging and now clasps his hands in prayer towards a person and even a wall clock. As I listened to this, I thought of the senior minister no longer being unable to distinguish between a person and a wall clock. But he continued, ‘For my senior minister to join his hands in prayer made me think of myself and the abilities I have left. Thinking, now, of myself, my own problems, and what will become of me in the end, made me anxious.’ Listening to this story caused me to straighten up.”

As we age, we lose many things; our memory also becomes fuzzy, but even so, some things remain until the end.

Reverend Degawa thought that what remains must be the most important thing that the person has been keeping. For the senior minister, to be able to continue to clasp his hands in prayer until the very end, is because the senior minister had been clasp-

ing his hands his whole life, towards something sacred. On the other hand, he realized that the senior minister may have been choosing to make everything sacred by clasping his hands towards them. He realized that such an outlook on life existed.

What will remain until the very end, for each of us? This is an issue we all must face on our own. That is how we spend everyday, every moment of our lives is important. It is important to pray, here and now, request that problems we face can be transformed into blessings and to be grateful for our blessings.

It is said that we live by being allowed to live. I do not think this means, “What percentage of 100% are we given support to live, and what percentage of life do we live on our own efforts?” I think it means, “Our lives are supported 100%, therefore, with the 100% we are allowed to live, we should live it fully.”

With this perspective, we can live our given life fully.

It may mean that the more Konko Daijin becomes “Konko Daijin,” the more Kami’s wish will be realized and Kami’s joy will grow.

Konko Daijin was the first pioneer, but aren’t we also pioneers? In addition to being born into and live our lives in this world, we are bestowed several conditions, relationships, etc., together with Divine Will that we can find various meaning in.

While we are being guided and allowed to live through Divine Will, we are receiving blessings in our given situations and relationships.

It may sound outrageous if I say it in this way, and you may think of it as a presumptuous request, but I think that if we make an outrageous request to Kami, Kami is also seeking to receive our outrageous requests.

A SHORT STORY BASED ON THE FAITH OF KONKOKYO

*After the Independent Service on June 8, 2014 at the Grand Service Hall, Konkokyo Headquarters held a Grand Assembly of the Faith Movement "Let us Live a Mutually Fulfilled Life With Kami." During this time, Ms. Yoko Takaguchi (Konko Church of Nakaizumi, Fukuoka) spoke about her own Faith story.*

# A Faith Which Brings Joy and Helps Others



I learned about Konkokyo through my marriage, however, it took about ten years to believe in Kami's existence. I had doubts and thought divine blessing was just a coincidence. Kami looked past this in my heart.

My first born son, who was captain of the softball team, hurt his elbow and was unable to throw a ball when he was in the sixth grade. Moreover, he sprained his ankle and hurt his knee, which prevented him from walking. We went to the hospital, but my son didn't get well at all and the doctor gave up on him. I was made to rely on Kami.

From then on, we stopped going to the hospital and started going to worship at the Konko Church with him everyday instead. Little by little, he gained relief from the pain and was able to walk. I was unable to face Kami until I couldn't do anything by my own effort.

By mediating my problems during that time to Kami, I was allowed to ex-

perience faith little by little. Konkokyo teaches me how to live and about my own inner being based on the Way of the Universe. Konkokyo is a wonderful religion that not only saves me, but also others. Kami rewards our efforts if we keep working at the teachings as much as possible. By eliminating doubt and depending on Kami, I began to understand Kami is very caring.

A woman named Yuri was the first person I shared our faith with. She asked me about Konkokyo and I replied, "Christianity teaches 'But whoever strikes you on your right cheek, turn to him the other also.'" Konkokyo teaches 'Did you hurt your hand when you struck me?'" She was moved by my story and started to attend church with me. Her character became more kindly shortly after practicing teachings, which showed me that "faith changes people, faith saves people."

I had invited neighbors and those who had problems to come with me to the church. They are all the first in their families to start believing in

Konkokyo. What a wonderful thing that people can be saved by faith! I really know the difference between a family with faith and without faith because I grew up in a family without it.

Before the meeting with Konkokyo, I had been lost in greed and selfishness. I didn't understand I had been suffering and I focused on the issue at hand. Not knowing about Konkokyo's teachings, I wasn't able to change my way of thinking. I couldn't even imagine that my prayers would reach Kami.

Konkokyo reveals my real self and teaches the Way of the Universe. From there, it teaches me how to accumulate virtue in my life and receive divine blessings from generation to generation. Our Founder says "As far as I'm concerned, the only thing that matters is saving people." and "people's salvation is Kami's prosperity." I would like to repay the joy of encountering such a big and compassionate Kami by continuing to share how Konkokyo is so wonderful.

## Delivering the Face to Faith by e-mail



"Face to Faith" is now available through email. The Konkokyo International Center has been printing its "Face to Faith" newsletter and distributing it through the mail. KIC has begun distributing its newsletter by PDF file, via email. Color pictures are sharper and clearer. And through this electronic means, we are doing our share in preserving our natural resources. Please try it. If you would like to receive your newsletter by email, please contact us at [kic@konkokyo.or.jp](mailto:kic@konkokyo.or.jp).



## The 200<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Our Founder's Birth Held

The activities taking place at Iki-gami Konko Daijin's Grand Service was intended to remind people of The Founder's spiritual growth. Witnessing where The Founder was born and

**O**n September 28 which applies a day before our Founder's birthday, Iki-gami Konko Daijin Grand Service was held at 9:30 a.m. in the Grand Service Hall.

Following the Service, the 200<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Our Founder's birth was officiated from 1:30 p.m. at the Faith Training Center and followed by the memorial concerts performed by the chorus and brass band of the Konko Gakuen Music Club and Sacred Music of Konkno-kyo Association (Tengaku-Kai) from 2:00 p.m. in the Grand Service Hall.

At 6:00 p.m., a fife and drum parade marched from Konko Station toward the precinct of Headquarters. After the parade passed, there was both a lantern procession and a portable shrine (mikoshi) procession making its way along the same route.

This anniversary event was observed and celebrated by many along the route, who also offered their prayers to the marchers and procession participants.

Other believers were seen walking along the side of Satomi River towards the Headquarters Property following their visit to the Founder's birth place.

Under the autumn night sky, a shadow performance highlighting the life of the Founder was viewed by many people who enjoyed it, and reflected on the Founder's life as a means to deepen their own faith development.

the house where he grew up, commemorating his adoption by the Kawates and his encounter with Kami encouraged people to emulate The Founder's spiritual development.

There are two points of interest regarding the early years

of The Founder. First, his birth occurred on the same day of the Omiya Shrine Festival, one of the local deities at The Founder's birthplace. His parents were said to be glad the birth occurred on the festival day. The second point concerns The Founder's biological father's devotion to Shinto and Buddhist practices, often taking The Founder to visit shrines and temples. Some have speculated that this created a strong sense of faith in The Founder from an early age.

The day after the Grand Service, September 29, the actual anniversary

of The Founder's birth, a lecture was given by Reverend Hiroshi Takebe, Director of the Konkno-kyo Research Institute. The title of his presentation was "A Wish Which Has Been Continuing" and was followed by a discussion. Reverend Takebe's presentation was the last of numerous presentations by series of his throughout the year. Other presentation titles included: Signs of a Faith; Between Kami and People; The Way of Kami and People; The Way of the Universe; and The Way of Relief.

These presentations were intended to provide an opportunity for people to rethink The Founder's faith, pursue the goal of living with Kami and follow Kami's way.





**T**he 2014 Konko Churches of North America Conference was held in Toronto, Ontario, Canada from August 8 to 10. The theme was “Let us receive Kami’s blessings and unconditional love; living a joyful life of appreciation”. This was the second of the five year plan of movements of the KCNA. We were extremely grateful to have Reverend Motoo Tanaka, the head minister of Konko church of Osaki as our guest speaker. He gave a wonderful presentation about realizing Kami’s blessings, even in disasters. He talked about his relief efforts in the areas affected by the Great Tsunami, and of his own battle with cancer. It was a very powerful presentation. The discussion groups

went extremely well because Reverend Tanaka brought up many interesting things to talk about. We had a surprisingly large turn out of about 80 people, with the oldest participant being 93! Prior to the Conference, the Family Camp (ages 1-12), Konko Youth Camp (13-17), Young Adults (18-25) and Spirituality Bridge (21+) were all held with great success. Reverend Takao Kishii, the head Minister of the Host Church of Toronto, expressed his hope and confidence that the Conference was a success, meaning that each participant was able to take home some new idea or meaning that would help grow their faith.

Reported by Reverend Stephanie Laite (Toronto Church)

### **Memorial Service for Japanese Paraguayans Held**

**O**n August 15, 2014, a memorial service was held at the public cemetery of the Japanese-Paraguayans’ association in Asuncion city. The service was officiated by Reverend Ryoichi Iwai, the director of the Konkokyo Asuncion Activity Center, in the Konkokyo memorial service ritual, with the chanting of the Mitama Prayer and Main prayer. The prayers were followed by the offering of flowers by the participants. Over a hundred people attended the service, including the association’s directors and the memberships’ family members.

The formal service was followed by the sermon by Reverend Iwai. He expressed the following thoughts: “ I feel that the ancestors’ spirit are saying, ‘Thank you for coming. I am grateful to you, for attending today’s memorial service.’ Because we have been given Kami’s spirit, He lives within our hearts. I hope that you will cherish this and honor your ancestors’ spirit, find happiness and help others. If you treasure your

ancestors’ spirit, your family’s root will grow strong. If you nurture your own Kami soul that Kami has given you, like the strong roots, the trunk, branches and leaves of the tree, your family, will also thrive and you will find the happiness that you seek. I hope that this message from your ancestors

will encourage you to nurture this Kami heart that is within you.”

Some of the attendees were moved to tears upon hearing this and a woman said that she wished young people could hear speeches like this.

Reverend Iwai was grateful that although the attendees were of

diverse faiths, including the Church of Perfect Liberty’s, Reiyu-Kai and SGI, they showed interest in observing the Konkokyo ceremony.

Looking back the memorial service, He concluded by saying that it is his humble wish to begin developing activities in Paraguay to spread the Way to the people of the local population.



## Ikigami Konko Daijin's Grand Service Held at Konkokyo of Korea

Reverend Nobuhiro Kusuki, a staff member of KIC visited the Konko churches of Korea and the Konkokyo Seoul Activity Center from October 16 to 20, 2014. During his visit he attended Ikigami Konko Daijin's Grand Service held at Konkokyo of Korea in 18 and participated in meetings with believers in Korea and Reverend Kinya Suenaga, the Director of Konkokyo Seoul Activity Center.

A woman believer who was attending from a day before's preparing for the service said "It is very joyful for me that my husband who didn't come to church before even I invited him is attending the monthly service recently by a meeting with Reverend Suenaga."

The Reverend Suenaga told his aspiration toward the Fifteenth Anniversary Service of Konko church of Korea which will be held on this spring thus;

"I would like to make a basement which the faith of



Konkokyo will be accepted in Korea, and to search a way how to make a style of which Korean people can receive the Divine Blessings. Especially, since last year, I offered a prayer note for the Konkokyo of Korea to the altar, and setting every Sunday as prayer day and am focusing into prayer mainly."

## Trainee from Korea Finished the Program

Miss Kim Hyoshin, a believer from Konkokyo of Korea, recently spent a month training at Konkokyo Headquarters in Japan beginning on October 15. She mainly worked on translating of *manga* which tells our Founder's life (published in September, 2014) into Korean and shared her impressions about the experience and training with us:

"I tried to translate the sentences to make this as easily understandable as possible, even for people who first meet Konkokyo and our Founder through the *manga* as I did. I deeply considered each character's story by trying to experience it through their viewpoint. The most impressive character to me was Mrs. Tose. I

thought the Founder couldn't concentrate fully on his sacred tasks if not for her support. She did not have many lines of dialogue, but she was impressive and I liked her very much.

I was impressed by the sight of the Founder's Worship Hall,



where many people came to worship without any prompting by commercials or advertisements, and by the Founder's teachings about giving our gratitude to the Earth.

The Staff Members at Headquarters who supported my training life were very gentle and warm-hearted and they were just like my family there. The members at Headquarters usually never forgot to say "thank you," even for little things, so after going back to Korea, I would like to have a similar heart of gratitude and to live with faith like them.

From now on, I would like to support translations like this too."



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