

“Receive Blessings People Can See”

*A History & Compilation of
Faith Stories & Virtue Received*

through the

Konko Church of Portland



*90th Anniversary of Establishment
Commemoration*

Establishment Date

April 1st, 1931

In gratitude to those who shared your stories
to help us find our way.

May our own stories
light the way for many more...

*If you practice faith and receive divine blessings
through someone's teachings,
you should express your appreciation
by teaching others in turn.*

This is the responsibility of a person who practices faith.

(Voice of the Universe #384 / Gorikai III Jinkyu Kyogoroku 26)

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Through the Konko Church of Portland



“Because Tenchi no Kami can see through people’s hearts, if you keep reflecting upon yourself, you will not make mistakes.”

- Rev. Bunjiro Hirayama
Founding Head Minister

"In this Faith, you save yourself with your own heart. Awaken to the Divine Soul within your heart, and you will be able to receive endless blessings."

- Rev. Nobuharu Uzunoe
Second Head Minister

**“Receive blessings people can see.
It will be a great sign for people looking for the way.”**

- Rev. Michie Uzunoe
Third Head Minister

**“There are no accidents.
Blessings are not so much as what happens, but when it happens. Watch for divine arrangements of timing.”**

- Rev. Andrew Uzunoe
Fourth Head Minister

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(* Periods as explained by Rev. Michie Uzunoe since their arrival)

90TH ANNIVERSARY HEAD MINISTER ADDRESS

Thank you all for joining today to celebrate with us, 90 years of the Konko Church of Portland serving our community, and our Ikigami Konko Daijin Autumn Grand Ceremony.

We are not here today because we put a few things together and sent out invitations, rather we are here because of the hard work, virtue and prayers of all those who have come before us who have laid the foundation for this church and all we have today. You see, our success is never just our own doing, it is a culmination of all the people who have surrounded us our whole lives supporting us and helping us to succeed.

This church is no different. Without the support of the Konko community, the extraordinary efforts by ministers and members who have passed on, we would not be here today to be able to say “thank you”.

Efforts from Rev. Bunjiro Hirayama who came to this unknown country, and then to this city to establish the church upon request. Returning from internment after WWII having lost his mother and wife who passed away in the camp to find that all property and accounts had been confiscated never to be returned; to find that many of the members did not return at all. Left with nothing, and being almost 70 years old at the time, how easy would it have been to call it quits. Yet, he did not, for there was no quit within him. Nor would he give up on his goyo. He started over and rebuilt it all again.

Efforts from our founding families who, when Rev. Hirayama passed away without a successor, were determined not to let the church close. They did the church duties themselves while writing letters requesting a minister.

Efforts from Rev. Isao Goto, who becoming the interim Head Minister, prayed for and found a young successor couple. Rev. Michihiro Yuasa, who sacrificed time from his own family and church, and traveled many hours from Seattle once a month to hold services for the members here.

Efforts from Rev. Nobuharu Uzunoe, who at a youthful age, was asked to take over a church in a foreign country, and through many hardships expanded the church, recognized the need to change to American ways, and developed a national youth program to plant seeds for the future.

Efforts from Rev. Michie Uzunoe, who during her leadership, used her special talent of understanding both cultures to smooth the transition from being a “Japanese Church” to a Portland Community Church, able to help all people without losing our roots. She also focused upon “Family Faith” instead of individual faith, creating a nurturing environment that was perhaps slower, but stronger and everlasting.

Efforts from our fellow Konko Churches in North America—their devoted ministers and believers, who supported us throughout the years. Efforts from our Ancestral Spirits from far and abroad who continue to pray for our church today. The Hachiya family, who when stuck in Japan due to the sudden onset of WWII, spread the Faith there through Rev. Hirayama’s influence, and whose children continues to write and prays for our church.

Efforts from Konkokyo Headquarters and Konko Sama’s prayers for each of us—the source of virtue flowing forth to us. Churches such as Rev. Hirayama’s parent church of Fukuoka and Revs. Uzunoe’s parent church of Tsurunominato, who include us in their daily prayers. The Osaki Church whose Head Minister, Rev. Motoo Tanaka, trained us while we lived in Japan, and shall give the Anniversary sermon for us.

And to all of you, members of this community, who support and honor our church by attending this service today.

To all those past and present; **Thank you** for these efforts. **Thank you** for never giving up. **Thank you** for the continued support and guidance we are still receiving to this day.

We, this church, are like the trees in a forest, we do not stand alone. There is a vast network of prayers and support above and underground, even from places we never knew about that continue to supply the virtue of this church.

Virtue, is what we call all of the effort, sweat, blood and tears of those who have come before us. It has been passed down, enabling us to hold this service and is the reason why we are here today, alive and able to say “thank you” and applaud and recognize everyone’s efforts. But just to say “thank you” is not enough. We must show our gratitude by making sure it does not stop here, as we are but a link in the chain that is this community and this Portland Church.

As the Head Minister, I will do my best to preserve and grow the virtue of this church. We shall strive to serve our members and our community to become stronger and create a better future. For **this** is the **one way** we can truly show our gratitude to them.

Passing down the teachings, lessons learned, and faith to the future generations so that this Faith and church may continue to help the people of this world.

Thank you for sharing this service today, and may we work together to build that future.

Rev. Andrew Uzunoe
Fourth Head Minister
Konko Church of Portland



PREFACE

Why We Are Starting Faith Stories - Rev. Michie Uzunoe

[Excerpt from 2010 newsletter article]

There is a favorite teaching poem I recite at the end of my daily prayers that reads:

*For spreading this way of faith, are signs to move forward,
Such great gratitude for receiving blessings.*

The meaning of this poem is that Kami gives us blessings, and these blessings are also for examples to save others. The gratitude is not just for us who were helped by receiving the blessings, but more for the fact that blessings can be received, which sheds a light in the darkness for those who are in need. The blessings become signposts that will help guide, give inspiration and hope to many people down the road as others hear or read about them.

When asked to write an article for the Konko Review, reflecting upon this poem I realized that if faith experiences are not written, they will not become sign posts and disappear with time. Our Founder also taught that to share our faith experiences with others is the responsibility of a believer, and is the greatest show of gratitude to Kami. With this in mind, I accepted the article assignment.

Just this past year [2009], one of our eldest believers was diagnosed with cancer. Unable to keep food down even with various methods, he had lost considerable weight in a body that was already quite thin. Thus he quickly weakened, and as the doctor said he couldn't undergo chemo unless he gained strength and I felt he had no will to fight it, I could not strongly plead to Kami to save his life. I was truly grateful that at least he had no pain.

However, one day during my morning prayer I heard in my heart Kami Sama say, "I will save his life through the virtue of the 150th Anniversary." But I did not relay this to the believer, as I was afraid I may be wrong. Soon after this revelation, when his wife suggested he start drinking the same herbal drink she was taking, I felt this was a sign from Kami and so encouraged it. He became able to eat, regained his strength, and a few months later the doctor diagnosed the cancer had shrunk considerably into almost nothing.

I finally told the believer a month after he started recovering about the revelation. However, I was very sorry to Kami and am continuing to apologize for not having the courage to immediately relay the revelation given to me.

But through this experience, I have realized four key points:

1. During a Big anniversary, Big blessings can be received.
(2009 was the Konko Faith's 150th Anniversary)
2. Virtue accumulates through regular faith practice.
(This believer and his wife come to worship every day to church together.) As they say, a million dollars start from a penny.
3. Ikigami Konko Daijin's Mediation work is still very much alive.
4. How important it is to document current examples of Kami's virtue and blessings for the future generations.

In the old days, sharing faith stories was common, but somehow has become "outdated." However, I now realize their importance to our own faith and inspiration, to leave signposts for future believers.

This Faith has continued because each current generation shared their stories and passed them on. We must do the same. So, I felt I received this as Homework from Kami, and have asked our believers to write a faith story from their experiences for each monthly newsletter.

For if we, who are living right now, do not leave behind written blessings, **this living way of faith will disappear and become fossils.**

I am praying to be able to spread blessings received to even one more person.
Thank you!

Rev. Michie Uzunoe
Third Head Minister
Konko Church of Portland



Chapter 1: Founding Families

The Konko Faith was practiced in North America by Japanese immigrant families who brought their faith with them long before ministers were requested and churches were established. It was the strength of their faith and stories of blessings that inspired people around them to open their hearts to the universe, and to pray and become able to receive blessings for themselves. Many of them became leaders and even ministers of the faith in gratitude in order to help others as they had been helped.

The families and lay believers, along with the Hirayama Family, who are the foundation of this Portland Hiromae are the: Moriyasu, Inouye, Hamada, and Akagi families.

Their family histories from the 70th Anniversary booklet are included in the appendix at the end of this book. This chapter includes the few faith stories from and about them, that have survived.

Mr. Bunjiro Hirayama was a young man aspiring to make his way in a new land. Landing in Tacoma in 1903, he began a sign shop in Seattle. Later, calling for his mother **Iso** and wife **Komatsu** to join him, in time their kindhearted faith shined the way of Konko for many. Their gatherings established the Konko Kyo Association of Seattle. When the Seattle Mamichikai was formed between the union of his and Mr. Ueda's groups, being humble in nature he let others lead but helped as a board member. When they requested a minister from Japan and the Konko Church of Seattle was established, Bunjiro Hirayama was invited by believers who regularly attended his gatherings, to move to where they lived in Portland. Wishing proper training, he went to Japan to become ordained as a minister, and then returned to establish the Konko Church of Portland in 1931.

Hirayama Family

Mrs. Iso



Rev. Bunjiro



Rev. Komatsu



Mrs. Suzuko



From the Konko Library Mikage Newspaper Issue 45, pages 425-431, written Showa 5 (1930). *Miracle Blessing – Faith Story* by Bunjiro Hirayama. Seattle, America

This was three years ago. Although it was April, it was like monsoon season in Japan [generally June-July]. It was raining like this from the morning, but in the evening, it let up and a man from Tacoma named Shinji Fukuyama visited together with Mr. Fujino.

Mr. Fujino said, “This is Mr. Fukuyama, a relative of mine from Tacoma. He has an illness of the intestines and came to Seattle to see the doctor. I talked a lot about faith, but wish for you to speak more to him. He has intestinal cancer and has to have an operation, but the Tacoma doctor gave no guarantees. So, he came to Seattle to see a specialist [for a second opinion] and wish for you to please pray again [with him] to Kami.”



Looking at his face, he was around 40 years old, but looked thinned and ill from the cancer. I do not have a lot of virtue, but talked about faith. First, need to pray to sleep well, no mistakes by the doctor, and told him teachings of the Founder regarding praying before taking medicine. After talking, all three of us went to the Seattle Mamichikai to seek Mediation. Mr. Fukuyama received goshinmai [sacred rice paper] and he was told to receive it with gratitude and prayers to sleep well.

The next afternoon, Mr. Fukuyama came by after his examination. He was told if he did not get the operation within three days, he would not live past a week. He was highly disappointed as it was the same result as before. I told him, “There is a Mamichikai in Tacoma with the mediator Otsubo Sensei. Continue to pray and depend on Kami there.” He went home to consult his wife.

When he went to the Tacoma Mamichikai and spoke with Otsubo Sensei, he was told to pray for a week and to, “Think that Kami-Sama is performing your surgery and pray wholeheartedly (isshin).” Mr. Fukuyama and his wife decided not to operate. Instead, taking turns every morning and evening, they went to worship and prayed wholeheartedly.

From that first night, his body condition improved—he felt better and was able to sleep well. On the third day, he had a large bowel movement. Because it was black and had a strange smell, he thought his intestine had ruptured and the end was near as the doctor predicted would happen. Resigning himself to his end, he called his wife to come look. She thought it looked more like some object mass than stool. However, his stomach did not hurt and his head felt lighter. He found walking to be easier, and walked the hill to the church in gratitude to Otsubo Sensei who said, “You have received a great blessing,” and immediately relayed their gratitude to Kami. Then he said, “I will pray for a quick and smooth recovery of the stomach and intestines.”

Within one week, Mr. Fukuyama felt he had completely recovered. He was happy every day and the three meals he was now able to have each day never tasted so good. He was so grateful, he went to worship everyday. Within three weeks, he gained back 11 pounds. His store, too, received blessings and flourished. After one month, he was able to drive. One day, having to push the crank hard, [automobiles back then had to be cranked by hand to start], the crank slipped, hit his side, and he fainted. Seeing this, a neighbor rushed him to a nearby American hospital [rather than the local community one] where he had emergency stomach surgery. His thinned intestinal wall had ruptured.

Due to the accident, they were able to find the location of the intestinal cancer [where the mass had come off the wall of the intestine], and able to mend the thin area. He recovered and was able to go home in three days. The American surgeon had never seen such a thing—the ease of the process of his cancer recovery and the accident that completely healed the area.

In one week his body had returned to normal and he never had any further problems. Thus, with his wife, they became one of Tacoma’s strongest members.

Postscript:

First coming to my house to visit, then going to the Seattle Mamichikai, he had already begun to receive blessings from the first night he slept well.

Mr. & Mrs. Sukesaburo & Tora Moriyasu were the devoted Konko believers who asked Mr. Bunjiro Hirayama to come to Portland.



Tora was originally from Okayama where she practiced the Konko faith. According to her daughter, Sukesaburo, who also lived in Okayama, was not a Konko believer until, “after mother told him about all the wonderful okage [blessings].” As Sukesaburo worked for the Union Pacific Railroad Company, his family were able to travel often to Tacoma/Seattle to attend faith gatherings. Tora was a midwife, and able to help many women in the Japanese community who couldn’t speak English and hesitant to go to a foreign hospital. Before a church building was purchased in Portland, they offered to have Hirayama Sensei conduct services in their home.

This faith story was found after their second daughter, Frances Nobuko (Moriyasu) Soejima and husband Ben, moved out of their house to live with their children. It is written on the underside of the top drawer of the Moriyasu Family Altar. (Their altar is now cared for by Dan & Teresa Jackson.)



Showa 22, November 21st. SE 2877 Franklin Street. Through Oyagami Sama [Kami Sama] blessing, able to purchase a house more than we could wish for.

Top: 1948, February 13
(Then reads from R to L)
Itadani, Katsujiro
Moriyasu, Sukesaburo 70
Moriyasu, Tora 65

February 6, Friday 7pm, chimney caught fire. With firemen help, it did not do too much damage. Father went to church to give thanks. While gone, fire started again around 9pm. 67 firemen in about 40 minutes put out fire.

Because this was Kami Sama burning out the bad part [bad energy] of the house, from now on, even though good things will happen, we must continue to practice a strong faith. With Uncle Itadani Katsujiro’s help, a carpenter working for the Hapson family made/brought the altar on February 13th, and carried it upstairs. So happy today, I cleaned Kami Sama [altar] and wrote this in memory of appreciation.

Kazuko san and Nobuko san, please make sure you do not forget about Kami Sama. Papa and mama requests of you.

Mr. & Mrs. Sugao & Osame Inouye invited Hirayama Sensei to hold gatherings and services in their home before a church building was available. Mr. Sugao, donning service robes, assisted Hirayama Sensei in the services.



Their family was instrumental in assisting with paperwork and finances when establishing the church. They had four children Shizuko, Kiyo, Jerry, and George (passed away at age 4 due to stomach illness). From Nobuko & Ben Soejima, we know that Tora Moriyasu was there to help deliver Jerry.

3/2011 Newsletter Excerpt - Mitama Spirit Propagation by Rev. Lisa Uzunoe

... back in early December, I was cleaning my bedroom and finally decided to take down the Hiroshige woodblock print that Andy had put above our doorway. Andy loves the Edo period and salvaged this from the church's leaking garage years ago. It's been there forever, but it just didn't fit, and finally getting around to it, I was trying to decide what to do with it. I took a closer look, and it turns out the material it's printed on is cloth, not paper. So instead of sending it off to Goodwill or back to the church garage, I thought I would hang on to it a little longer to look it up and investigate.

Not two weeks later was the first time I went to Joni's house to talk about her mother's service. (Joni is the granddaughter of Sugao & Osame Inouye). Being seated at her living room table I was shocked, because there, hanging on her wall was the EXACT woodblock print in the same frame, just a different color border (or maybe the original color border that had faded on ours). When I asked her about it, she said an uncle or another relative of hers had gone to Japan and brought back 15 or so of these prints.

We determined that this relative must have given one to Hirayama Sensei long ago, this one here I had in my home.

Maybe this seems to be no big deal for some people. But "there are no accidents" and the timing was unreal.

I really felt a **powerful** connection for the first time. And felt this was Hirayama Sensei speaking to us, saying,

"I am still here. We (the founding families) are still working for you, for the church."



9/2005 Newsletter Excerpt - Blessings I received by Rev. Michie Uzunoe, Third Head Minister, Konko Church of Portland

...Members:

Twenty-five years ago, my father-in-law told me when he visited Portland, "Even though you are a minister, you cannot use or think of members as your own because they are Kami's children."



Now, I think the members are the treasure of the church. Church and ministers are useless without any members (people). I have many wonderful memories in my 33 years at the Portland Church. I cannot write about all of them, but I would like to pick out a few people who left their strong faith in my heart.

Our Portland church has an outstanding history from Rev. Bunjiro Hirayama and family, who started Konko Faith in the very early times in North America. But after Rev. Bunjiro Hirayama served his fullest and passed away, the church had almost five years of an absence of a Head Minister. Therefore, a few very strong and devoted members stayed and worked hard to keep the it alive. They amazed me at how much they were proud of their church and respected Rev. Hirayama. Through their faith and dignity, it made us deeply respect Rev. Bunjiro Hirayama, whom we had never met, and the Portland Church. These are the people who spiritually supported us very much until today.

Mrs. Hisayo Akagi – She visited church everyday. She prepared services with her own expenses and stored imperishable food items after the service. She tried to save as much as she could for their future minister of the Portland Church. We couldn't have survived our first year there without this full pantry of canned food. Even with rationing, we used up everything except three small cans of sliced olives, which I didn't know what it was at that time.



Hisayo Akagi strongly believed Kami's divine arrangements would bring a new minister and she kept requesting to KCNA not to close the Portland Church. She was key in keeping the Portland Church alive. Even to the end her prayers were for the Church. She passed away a couple of days before a Gotaisai [Grand Ceremony], so we were able to have her funeral after the Gotaisai with all the Gotaisai's offerings upon the altar, and even guest speaker minister attended her funeral. [This allowed them to have her funeral without extra expenses.] Her donated cast iron pan that still continues to do goyo [church duties] even after she is gone.

Mr. Minoru Akagi – He was the eldest son of Mrs. Hisayo Akagi. He supported his mother and visited church everyday and supported the church family all the time.

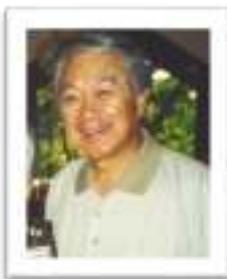


When he find out he had cancer, I called Japan right away because Rev. Nobuharu Uzunoe was at Honbu Headquarters and was able to otodoke [seek Mediation] with Konko sama right away. Thus, I strongly felt he would be saved. After five years, in 1978, his cancer came back, but he held sensei's hand and thanked him with a smile the day before he passed away.

We experienced our first funeral service. A snow storm started right after the funeral. It was so sad. We felt so sorry because we weren't good enough to save him. Sorry because we didn't have enough space for the funeral service. We wished and started to pray for a bigger church and property. Mr. Minoru Akagi was strongly concerned about the church's future when he was alive. Therefore, we felt Kami or his mitama spirit (we are not sure which) was pushing us in this direction since his passing.

Two years later in 1980, we finally were able to move to the current property, which is almost eight times bigger than before. At the 50th Anniversary in 1981, Minoru-san's second son, Randy Akagi, met Miss. Tomiye Takeda from the Gardena church and got married. Now, they are among the most devoted members in our church along with Minoru's wife, Shizu Akagi. His nice and gentle smile still warms my heart. I can feel he is still working and protecting our church together with his mother.

Mr. Jerry Inouye – I should say he lived in Neverland. He didn't lose his spirit since he was boy. He kept and followed Rev. Hirayama's one teaching for all his life. *Teaching: Do not pray to win, but to perform your very best for a good, clean ball game, regardless of the outcome.* He was a teenager in the championship baseball play-offs and according to Jerry, by following Rev. Hirayama's teaching, they did capture the championship.



Jerry always said if we do church goyo [duties] then Kami will give us blessings. He left the words, "If you pray with a single heart through Ikigami Konko Daijin, you will receive divine blessing, but most importantly, you will be honest, trustworthy and lead a clean lifestyle."

Following his words, during the time the church was without a minister, he came to church and offered water to Kami's altar everyday. He didn't switch churches even as the church became smaller, there was no minister, and no one else knew about Konkokyo.

Jerry became the president of the Japanese community in Portland, but he was still proud of his church and when Rev. Uzunoe was appointed as the new minister, Jerry tried as much as possible to introduce him to everybody. The Portland Japanese community honors all of Jerry's accomplishments after his passing through the "Jerry Inouye Annual Golf Tournament."

I have many fond memories with Jerry, but I will never forget how he amazed me in one happening. In 1973 (the fifth month after I came to Portland), Head Minister Rev. Uzunoe was gone for a trip so I had to take care of the church. Then Jerry came for Toritsugi mediation. He said the apartment he owned had caught fire and burned down. I was shocked because it happened while the Head Minister was gone. Also I was scared because I was young (22) and had no experience with Mediation. I couldn't say any words, but in the next moment Jerry said, "I came to thank to Kami sama because nobody was hurt even though the apartment burned down." Also, he made an offering. I gave him goshinmai [sacred rice & paper]. I thanked Kami after Jerry left.

I thanked Rev. Hirayama for teaching his believers so well. I thanked Jerry as he didn't look down on me even though I was his children's age. Then I cried because it was my first Toritsugi mediation.

Jerry passed away after being granted time to arrange his own funeral. We truly miss him. Thank you Jerry, you well lived for us. His great smile was the open doors of our church and continues with the work of his spirit in his children.

Excerpts from Rev. Bunjiro Hirayama Biography Chapter 7, p70

Altar Boat by Rev. Michie Uzunoe (Third Head Minister, Portland Church).

Rev. Michie's visa to come to the United States was taking longer than it should have. Getting worried about whether she would ever be able to go, one night she had a dream she was drifting on the ocean hanging on to an altar table when she saw the Hawaiian Islands ahead.

Thinking, "This is halfway to America, I can make it!" After waking up she realized, "Kami showed me I am able to go to America," so to wait patiently. She felt relieved. What was strange was that the altar table she was floating on was three-tiered. She had never seen or heard of a three-tiered altar table as one piece before. "Hassoku" means "eight legs" (not twelve).



Months later, upon arriving in Portland, she saw this three-tiered altar piece being used at the Portland altar. Rev. Michie felt Hirayama Sensei's spirit had eased her worries and pulled her across the Pacific Ocean.

Ask and You Shall Receive. In 1974, shortly before Rev. Hirayama's Five Year Memorial Service, Revs. Nobuharu and Michie Uzunoe were newly wed, in their early twenties, and did not speak English well.

It was their first time running a church, and it proved difficult with only \$72 a month to provide for themselves and the church—including almost a dozen hungry young male students who came to visit often. Wanting to give Rev. Hirayama the grand service he deserved but not having any reserves for the service offerings, Rev. Michie recalls praying to Rev. Hirayama, "I am sorry we cannot give you as grand a service as we wish to. If you want a nice service, please help us."

Rev. Michie then continued cleaning out the basement of the church, which was still full of old boxes from Rev. Hirayama. Burning a box of empty offering envelopes (holding them up one by one to make sure they were empty), by the time she finished that day, out of those old envelopes she had collected \$150! They were able to give Rev. Bunjiro Hirayama a grander service than they ever imagined they could.

We know that even to this day, the new church location, new building, and even the new church extension has been supported by all of the Hirayama family spirits, as they continue to look after this Konko Church of Portland.

Excerpts from Rev. Bunjiro Hirayama Biography Chapter 7, p71-72

Rev. Lisa Uzunoe (Associate Minister, Portland Church)

The virtue of the Hirayama family is so strong here in Portland. We are constantly being guided by so many divine arrangements, protection, blessings, and “reminders” from them that we could write an entire book. Two very important lessons I wish to share are the following.

Your Heart - Where there is a will, there is a way.

We had activities after one memorial service day, so were not able to visit Hirayama Sensei’s gravesite as usual. Apologizing and promising to go on Monday after work, I do not remember if it was traffic or something else, but I ended up not going that day...or the next. Knowing me, I probably came up with some excuse or was too tired.

Then, that evening when I went to light the candles at the Mitama altar during prayer service, the end of the wooden match broke, spun onto the Hirayama Prayer sheet and then it ignited. Smothering it immediately to put it out, after removing the burnt ashes, my heart skipped a beat. It had made a hole in the corner of the prayer (the only copy we had at the church at that time as the digital copy was lost). Its shape looked exactly like a human heart.

I knew immediately that Hirayama Sensei was asking about the sincerity of my heart. This time, I did not fail to go visit the gravesite the very next day!

Although it has been retyped, I still use the same prayer sheet as a visual reminder that when we practice faith, our sincerity and having a true heart is of utmost importance. Hirayama Sensei was a man of integrity and propriety. I believe he wishes for all of us to carry this on.



Goyo With Gratitude.

Since Andy Sensei needed to work on Saturdays, I started to officiate the gravesite services which are on the days before the Spring and Autumn Memorial Services. One such morning, on the way to the gravesite, I was complaining about how it should be the Head Minister’s job to officiate and he should take off work. Turning onto the next street, I heard a thunk in the back of the car. Realizing it must have been the hot pot for the tea offering, I figured there would still be enough hot water left, so it should be okay.

Upon arrival and inspection, I found the hot pot had not only fallen over, but spilled its contents into the tray wrapped in green cloth that held the main prayer and tamagushi branch. My heart sank as opening the cloth revealed the hot water had “cooked” half the branch leaves brown, and stained green the white shide paper and main prayer.

(As it was spring and I did not find an evergreen branch in the right shape, it was the first time I used a heavenly bamboo branch for the tamagushi thinking it was pretty and would be good enough. Hard to tell in black and white, but half of the leaves are bright green while the other half is dirt brown.)



Here again, I felt I was being reminded by Kami-Sama and Hirayama Sensei that a complaining heart is not accepted, as it is one that has forgotten the blessings and protection we receive.

Apologizing in front of Hirayama Sensei's gravesite, I thanked him for reminding me that true goyo is done with gratitude and joy.

This chapter would not be complete without mentioning the virtue and wishes of Rev. Komatsu Hirayama who taught the Kibi music and dance to many girls throughout the Konko Churches of America, and Mrs. Suzuko Hirayama whose faith allowed her to continue the church after Hirayama Sensei's passing. Even in her last years, she held on and did not pass away until after the successor of the Portland Church (Rev. Nobuharu Uzunoe) was introduced to her.

Through their virtue, the Portland Church continues to exist, and to have girls just the right ages from each generation to carry on performing the Sacred Kibi dance and music live—currently the only church left in North America.

All of the founding believers and families worked hard for their communities, their faith, and for future generations. May our faith become just as strong to carry on their virtue and legacies.

Highlights 1903 – 1972

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|---------|--|
| 1903 | Bunjiro Hirayama arrives in America |
| 1930 | Rev. Bunjiro Hirayama ordained as Konkokyo minister |
| 1931 | Rev. Hirayama established the Konko Church of Portland |
| 1941 | Rev. Komatsu Hirayama ordained
Church Closed (WWII) |
| 1944-45 | Mrs. Iso & Rev. Komatsu Hirayama passed away |
| 1949 | Rev. Bunjiro Hirayama re-established Portland Church |
| 1969 | Rev. Hirayama passed away |
| 1972 | Mrs. Suzuko Hirayama passed away |

Grand Ceremony 1937-1938



Rev. Komatsu Hirayama—lead koto with Ms. Nobuko Moriyasu (Soejima), Ms. Suzuko Matsushita (Hirayama), and Ms. Hisayo Akagi to her right. Rev. Hirayama officiating. Mrs. Iso Hirayama seated right front next to stage.

Kibimai dancer unknown in this photo. Although both the Moriyasu girls, Kazuko and Nobuko, learned the kibimai from Komatsu Sensei.

Rev. Michie Uzunoe played under Nobuko (Moriyasu) Soejima until the 50th Anniversary, where she suddenly felt something (someone) push her to say, “I’ll play lead koto.” She felt Komatsu Sensei’s wish come through her.

Since then, Rev. Michie has taught girls how to play the koto and with Rev. Hideko Oya’s help, how to dance the kibimai. She has also designed and sewn all of the kibimai top garments, and even some bottom hakama pieces.

Where many churches in North America no longer perform the Kibimai, the Kibi koto music and Kibi dance continue in Portland.

(Photos in Appendix A)

Chapter 2: Foundation Period 1972 – 1982

8/2005 Newsletter - Excerpt from Rev. Michie Uzunoe article

The first 10 years [since Revs. Uzunoe came to Portland] was the foundation period: 1972 – 1982. I was 21 years old when I came to Portland in September 1972. Started with just \$72.00 (36 x 2) a month in offerings total. I don't know how we survived. I always had to run to the bank to deposit every Monday after the service. Also, whatever we tried, it seemed like everything turned wrong even though we believed we did the best we could...later I constantly had at least two jobs and even miscarried another baby.

[When asked about what it was like starting out at the Portland Church, Rev. Nobuharu Uzunoe recalled a member's comment while reseeding the lawn of dandelions. Mrs. Hisayo Akagi said, "You can eat dandelion leaves." To which Rev. Uzunoe remembers struggling with the question, "Why are we here? We didn't come to take out weeds."]

Just like an iceberg floating in water, you have a big chunk of ice in the water, but you can only see the little tip of blessings above the surface. That was the hardest time. Especially, when we were young because we could not see the future and virtue, both of which were invisible.

But, Kami never forgot to give a bonus to encourage us if we were hurt or suffering. In 1980, we moved to the current property, and after the 50th Anniversary in 1981, things gradually started to get better.



Departing Nagasaki



Shoveling snow. Michie pregnant with Amy

Revs. Nobuharu and Michie Uzunoe's faith was deeply influenced by Rev. Sue Kajiwara, their parent minister from the Tsurunominato Church in Nagasaki. The following is an article by Rev. Nobuharu Uzunoe that illuminates some of the virtue that they inherited and brought with them to the Portland Church.

**Konko Review April/June 2020 V46 No2: Article by Rev. Nobuharu Uzunoe
Head Minister, Konko Church of Gardena
(3rd Head Minister, Konko Church of Portland)**

Why did you become a minister?

Having failed my college entrance exams, I was spending a few days at the Konko Church of Tsurunominato (Nagasaki, Japan) after my high school graduation. The head minister there, Rev. Suye Kajiwara, said to me, "It is a very worthy thing to study at university and find work that contributes to society, but there are many people who are facing hardships and are suffering in this world.



It is even more important and worthwhile to help those people. So, you should become a mediator for Tenchi Kane No Kami-sama. Helping and saving those who are suffering is the most important and worthwhile work of all." At that point, though, I wanted to live freely as I liked being away from my parents and was dreaming of a rose-colored life. So I said, "No way! I don't know anything about Konko teachings or faith, or if God even exists. Besides, I can't possibly live the strict life of training to be a minister. Getting up early every morning, being made to clean and run around doing errands—I can't live like that, like a slave!" Kajiwara Sensei then said, "If you can please Kami-sama with your service (goyo), I guarantee you will be happy. Kami-sama will absolutely promise you a wonderful future. Don't worry, Kami-sama will teach you in a way that you will understand. You have time right now and no commitments, so why don't you stay here at this church for a while?" Since I didn't have anything particular to do, I decided to stay.

The church in those days was small, so at night I would put up a screen in the worship hall and sleep there. Thus, I was able to hear Sensei's voice praying late at night. Also, people with serious difficulties would come late at night to request toritsugi mediation. One morning, a young mother came running into church with a screaming baby in her arms. Shocked and bewildered, I watched the entire exchange between the mother and Sensei. Sensei immediately took down the sacred water that was on the altar, removed the rice from goshinmai, and soaking that paper in the water, told the mother also to pray with all her heart, and started applying the water-soaked paper onto the child's burned skin, praying with great intensity. The mother explained that she had made miso soup and put it on the table. When she looked away for just a moment, her daughter, who was not yet a year old

and had just started to walk holding onto things, had pulled the pot of hot soup towards her and was burned when it spilled all over her. She had first taken the baby to a pediatrician, but he had said there wasn't much to be done and just bandaged her up. The mother was blaming herself for her carelessness and apologizing over and over. With the bandages removed, I saw that the child's burnt skin, from her chest to her arms and legs, was actually loose and coming off. By the time Sensei had finished putting the paper soaked in sacred water on all the burned areas, the baby had stopped crying and was sleeping peacefully. Watching this scene unfold before my eyes, I could not but acknowledge that Kami exists and responds to our prayers. As for the little girl, though it took some time, her skin healed completely, with no scars and no problems afterward.

Many people came to the church to pray and seek mediation, but as I recall, there were a lot of young mothers in particular. Once, I remember two mothers with very similar problems who came on different days for toritsugi concerning their children, one a boy and one a girl, of about the same age. Both children had a problem with their hip joint, which would get dislocated easily. The doctors had given similar advice—to have surgery right away, or to immobilize the area in a cast and wait for the bone to grow and stabilize. Each mother sought mediation and advice on what to do. Sensei went to the altar and sought Kami-sama's direction. The answer she received and conveyed to them was, "Do not have surgery; if you do, the child will become a cripple." Both mothers continued to come to church daily with their children, but the mother of the little boy eventually had him undergo surgery for his hip, despite having been advised not to. One operation did not remedy the problem, and he had to have numerous surgeries, causing him to suffer greatly. The mother of the little girl, on the other hand, accepted the advice she received, declined surgery for her daughter, and came to worship every single day at the church, putting all her faith and trust in Kami-sama. The little girl's condition improved to the point where she had no trouble running around and playing.

There were many incidents during that time I was living at the church, and I was allowed to experience many strange and mysterious things. I was beginning to feel that Kami-sama really existed and answered prayers. As I was starting to change my way of thinking, Suye Sensei said to me, "If you pray sincerely and wholeheartedly, Kami-sama will always respond and give blessings. What is important is your heart. Have a heart that will be trusted by Kami-Sama. Practice that here; train yourself to be trusted by Kami-sama, and you will not fail to receive blessings."

Furthermore, "When you were born, Kami-sama sent your parents the message that 'This child will grow up to serve Kami.' So don't worry, if you

pray sincerely, wholeheartedly and with a heart of Kami, then Kami-sama will become one with you and work through you. Then people will be saved.” I was so moved by what she said that I accidentally said, “Yes.” Later, I thought, “Oh, no! I accepted without thinking” and regretted it. But since I had promised, I felt I couldn’t go back on my word. So I stayed at church and started training.

Every day I woke at 3:00am, cleaned the altar, prepared the offering of freshly cooked rice, and cleaned the toilets. Since I was up so early, I became sleepy during the day but was not allowed to sleep. I had no time to myself, no time off, no recreation—this was truly the life of a slave, I thought. I grew to hate this life of training and wanted to quit, so I called my father to tell him I wanted to go home. But my father said, “This is the path you chose; you have no home to return to.” I didn’t know what to do. I thought of finding another job and leaving, but there weren’t good jobs available. At a complete loss, I was sitting in the worship hall in the front of the altar, my mind a blank, when the image came to me of my parents’ worried faces. I sensed how much they had prayed for me and were still praying for me. Tears welled up, along with the feeling of deep sorrow and apology toward my parents. And I was able to feel that I must persevere, stay at the church no matter what, and complete my training.

I went to Sensei’s room to apologize, but she would not listen. She said, “You said you wanted to leave, so leave. Kami-sama can’t trust someone who breaks promises.” Again, I didn’t know what to do, so I went back to the worship hall and asked Kami-sama for guidance. Then I felt in my heart that “If I leave now, my life will be over,” and prayed that I be allowed to stay, even in a corner of the entrance hall next to the shoe cupboard. I went once more to Sensei’s room to apologize, and she said, “You may stay at church, you may take your meals here, too. But you must not do any goyo.” I was overjoyed to be told I could stay, but if I couldn’t do goyo, there was no point in my being at church. Once again, I went to the worship hall, faced the altar, and tried to think things through, debating with myself. “What a fool I’ve been! I had no understanding of my parents’ hearts, of Sensei’s heart, or Kami-sama’s intentions.” In that moment, when I felt deep sorrow and remorse toward all, tears started running down my face. I said to Kami-sama, “I offer my sincere apologies to you, to Sensei, and to my father and mother. There is no excuse for my attitude; I do not deserve forgiveness, and I do not ask for it. All I can do is apologize from the bottom of my heart.” I went to Sensei’s room again to apologize sincerely, and she was overjoyed, “Finally, you understand!”

Thus began my true spiritual training to become a Konkokyo minister. Rev. Suye Kajiwara was my spiritual teacher and her mitama continues to guide me even now after her passing.



3/1999 Newsletter – Why we have Memorial Services by Rev. N. Uzunoe

In our religion, we have the memorial service twice a year. Our Founder said, “Take good care of your mitama.” Therefore, we have one service in the spring in March and one in the autumn in September. I call March and September the mitama spirits’ months.

I practiced my faith at Tsuru no Minato Church in Japan. One night I had a dream. In my dream, there was a lady standing in water up to her knees. She was watching me. I asked her, “Who are you?”

She said, “I am a relative of yours. Because I took my own life, my spirit is confined to these waters, and my unhappiness continues even after death. However, in March and September [mitama spirits’ months], I am able to get out of the water.”

At this time, I awoke from my dream and wondered what it meant. All of our mitama spirits have anxiously been waiting for this memorial service.

Now that we have had the service, I am sure they are happy. Not only do we yearn for the happiness of our mitama spirits and wish to comfort them, but our mitama spirits also receive divine virtue from the Great Divine Spirit, Tenchi Kane no Kami.

1982 – Faith Story by Rev. Michie Uzunoe

In 1977, I saw dream two days in a row before I found out I got pregnant with Teresa. My grandmother showed up and said, “Have this baby. You will have three girls and two boys.”

[When Michie Sensei became pregnant again in 1982, already having three girls, figuring this one would be a boy, they were very excited. However, because the roads they took for their janitor work were bumpy and rough, she started bleeding. Unlike her first miscarriage where she had to pray to please let the baby go (because they couldn’t afford a second baby right after their first), she prayed to please keep this baby. However, even after being put on full bedrest, she lost the baby. Heart wrenching was this loss, especially to Nobuharu Sensei. Traumatized, she remembers very little from that time besides numbly pulling weeds, not knowing what else to do.]

After miscarriage, I lost my energy and my feeling so I just weeded the garden. One day while weeding, I heard Kamis voice, “If you can go through to live day by day, you will be okay.” Next day, Kami sama said, “Forgot, don’t forget to pray through Ikigami Konko Daijin.”

Then I thought even Kami sama forgets.

First time I able to smile in long time and got energy to go on.

70th Anniversary Book: Faith Story by Frances Soejima

There are many teachings by Konko Sama, but one of them I am most familiar with, and the one that impressed me the most was what mother always used to say, "When things go wrong, one must accept it, and can be comforted by thinking it could have been so much worse." That is what I have been telling my children. Teachings like that gives you a sense of satisfaction.



Sometimes when a mishap occurs, you end up saying "Arigato," Kami Sama thank you for the warning. But as you grow older, you begin to realize how important prayer is. No matter how little your onegai [request] is. No matter where you may be. Kami Sama will listen to you. For instance, we make frequent visits to the hospital where parking is full and we're in a hurry to meet that appointment. A little prayer before we leave home usually results in blessings--we are fortunate to have one space open near the entrance or not too far away.

70th Anniversary Book:

Kiyoko (Inouye) Nakayama, said that even now [in her later years] she prays every morning to the sacred rice paper with Tenchi Kane No Kami written on it. She recalls how her parents always taught them, "Arigatai to omoinasai, Tenchi Kane No Kami Sama" (You must feel thankful to Tenchi Kane No Kami.) "Through blessings I'm in good health. Without health, you can't live a good happy life. Konko Sama does protect us."



70th Anniversary Book & 2/2000 Newsletter - Faith Story by Jerry Inouye

I'm proud to be a firm believer of the Konko Faith. Our family is one of the few who have worshipped the Konko Religion since its inception here in Portland in 1931. I was only 10 years old at that time, but I can still recall attending the services conducted by the late Rev. Bunjiro Hirayama with my parents and sisters. We began to learn about the Konko Faith and its divine blessings, and started to practice the daily prayer *amatsunorito* [an old Shinto prayer no longer used in Konkokyo.]

Rev. Hirayama had many teachings, but I shall not forget the one which impressed me the most. It pertained to the championship baseball play-off. I was a teenage pitcher for the Portland Midgets. Prior to the game, I went to church in my uniform to pray. Rev. Hirayama taught me never pray to win, but to perform your very best for a good, clean ball game, regardless of the

outcome. I followed his teaching, and with timely hits and splendid defense, we captured the championship, winning by one run. It was a hard-fought and well-played ballgame by both sides.

Rev. Nobuharu Uzunoe, the Head Minister of our church for 29 years, has always stressed practicing faith to develop ourselves to become stronger Konko believers. Last New Year's Eve, I was anxious to attend the year-end service to express my profound thanks to Tenchi Kane No Kami for 3 exceptional divine blessings I received during the past year.

First and foremost, when I was diagnosed with prostate cancer, efficient doctors performed a radioactive seed implant in an outpatient procedure last January, 1999. The implant was a great success. There were no complications prior to or following the treatment, and I wholeheartedly thanked Ikigami Konko Daijin.

Secondly, considering not playing much golf last year, I was lucky to grab a couple of first place honors in the Goodwill Tournament and in the Nisei Senior Golf Tournament. My 81 gross-19hdc-p-net 62, not only yielded the first place "A" flight trophy but also a big perpetual trophy. Remember, I said earlier not to pray to win but to give your best in any sports endeavor.

Lastly was when I made a trip to Japan last November. I first attended the Portland-Sapporo Sister City's 40th "Anniversary Celebration" as a delegate. They gave us a royal welcome reception. Following the celebration I made an extended personal tour of Japan visiting my friends and relatives in six cities. It brought about the most memorable and best time of my life. Cooperation from the weatherman during the entire trip and not catching a cold were two of Kami's divine favors I received. If you pray with a single heart through Ikigami Konko Daijin, you will receive divine blessing, but most importantly, you will be honest, trustworthy and lead a clean lifestyle.

70th Anniversary Book: Faith Story on behalf of Shizu Akagi

Shizu Akagi is grateful for the many blessings she has received from Tenchi Kane no Kami. Her faith, which is sincere and simple, guides her in her daily life.

Every morning, she attends service to give thanks for her health, loving family and true happiness; and prays for her family and friends.



Shizu Akagi is not one of many words, but the faith she shows through her actions, and blessings she receives for herself and her family, speak for her.

70th Anniversary Book: Faith Story by Hisako Saito

Living with the influence of my mother’s faith and with Rev. Hirayama’s guidance and teachings, little by little I have come to have a heart of gratitude towards Kami Sama.

I pray that I can introduce these great teachings to those around me, so that they too can achieve their happiness.



I start every morning with a prayer from the teaching that says, “Receive blessings today so that large problem will become small, and small problems to become none,” and hope I can help and work more for others to make Kami Sama happy, and pray for world peace.

70th Anniversary Book: Faith Story by Ruby Noji

I feel blessed from the moment of my birth. There is one special experience I would like to share – an incident on the Washington Highway when Kami Sama saved a carload of vacationers.

Approximately 30 years ago, when we were residing in Beaverton, my family of five—along with a young college friend and our sheltie dog—piled in to our large Ford Country Squire Station Wagon. Our destination was Victoria, Canada via Port Angeles on the Olympic Peninsula.



I had just taken my turn at the wheel north of Centralia—near the Tenino Exit—when I tried to pass a large truck. Suddenly, my rear tire exploded, causing my car to become airborne. I held the steering wheel tightly while watching the car panels detach and fly off in to the air. As my car flew into the southbound traffic lanes, I turned the wheel sharply to avoid headlong collision.

Although unable to avoid sideswiping one car, occupants of both cars survived without any injuries.

Thanks to Kami Sama, I am alive today to share this experience.

70th Anniversary Book: Faith Story by Louis Stansell

Louis Stansell began going to the Konko Church through the influence of Lilian. He says he attends church because, "It strengthens your faith. Also for the fellowship of the members and support they give you...you can share experiences.



Then, there is that stronger feeling of 'there's someone out there that's going to help you.' Whether you have problems or don't have problems, the fellowship will support you. Your family supports you too, but it's a very different kind of support. We are staying healthy and continuing to enjoy life."

Mr. & Mrs. Stansell, who have four children and seven—going on eight—grandchildren, start their mornings by turning the page in their calendar that has a teaching written for each day. They turn the page when praying, read the teaching together, and use it as a guide throughout the day.

7/2000 and 9/2010 Newsletter: Faith Story by Linda Akagi

[Linda has multiple sclerosis, but has received blessings throughout her life which have enabled her to finish school, live on her own with a little help from great caregivers, and hold various jobs. She wrote the following article to share her experiences and blessings with all of us.]



When I was little girl I would go to church each morning with my father [Minoru Akagi]. Every morning, we would see Rev. Hirayama. Then, my father would take me to school. If there was no school that day I would go to Nigo grandma's at her hotel. Sometimes we needed to wait for him [Rev. Hirayama] to come downstairs or finish his breakfast, and then he had to put on his black robe.

While we were waiting for Rev. Hirayama, my father would give me 25 cents to put in the donation box. This box is in the front of altar. I kept trying to put that quarter in all by myself. It took me six months to do. Imagine a piggy bank, the hole is that size.

I got frustrated trying to put my 25 cents in the box, but I didn't give up. I knew that Kami-sama was watching over me, so I knew that I could do it.

Every time when I left the church to go home, Mrs. Hirayama always gave me snack bag cookies, or candy: even a piece of fruit.

After school was out, I went to my father's store. The school cab or bus dropped me off. Grandma Akagi always gave me *Go-shin-mai* [sacred rice paper] and the white and pink candy: it had the Konkokyo symbol on it.

I was very happy that I could be with my father at least two hours each day. When I was growing up, it was very difficult to see him. When I got up in the morning, he usually had gone to work. When he came home from work, I was usually in bed. I usually went to church with him, [for events] like the monthly services and the Grand ceremony. Sometimes, he fell asleep while the service was on.

I appreciate I am well go to school and work. I am grateful that my mother is healthy, and my brother, too, and also his family.

.....

I hope that you had a wonderful summer? The other night, I was thinking that September is around the corner when all the students are heading back to school again; remembering when my father had taken me to school. Before he dropped me off, on the way to school he would say, "let's stop by the church and say good morning to sensei." My school was two blocks from the church.

I always went to church with my father and Akagi grandma [Hisao Akagi], when there were special services at the church. I had watched my father sleep when the senseis gave their speeches in Japanese; I didn't know what they were talking about.

By the 70's, the Uzunoe family succeeded the church and most everything became English and so on. Kami-sama helped me attend grade school and high school. Even college was hard, but I wanted to do it and see how far I can reach.

Thank you Kami-sama for letting me go to work each day of my life.

I am so happy that my family is healthy and well.

3/2001 Newsletter – My Divine Blessing by Fumio Kuroye

When I was young, my father and mother went to the Konko Church in old town [old church location] every month to thank Kami Sama for all the blessings they received. The farm crop turned out wonderful and all the kids received health. I used to go along with them but I was so young that Kami Sama didn't mean much to me. I went along for the ride. But as I grew older, began to understand what Kami means.



Like one time when Eiko [my wife] came down with chest pain, I knew it was a heart attack. But I thought to myself I am going to let Kami handle it with the doctor. I rushed her to the hospital and they took a bunch of tests and came across her heart attack. It's hard to even get one doctor but she received blessings, she got five doctors working on her. They took x-rays and found out that her main artery was in good shape, but found out that her small artery was sort of damaged and plugged up.

I thought maybe they would have to do surgery, but she got another blessing. They said they can take care of it with medication without going through any by-pass or other surgery. What blessings she received again.

Sensei [Reverend] always teaches me that whatever it is, let Kami Sama handle it first. So now I pray wholeheartedly from deep down in my heart. Even at work or taking medicine, I pray to Kami Sama first, then take medicine. I thank Kami Sama every moment of my life.

Thank you Kami Sama.

10/2001 Newsletter – Faith story by Mrs. Eiko Kuroye

For a long time my body has been weak. For a long time now, I have been in the church and the ministers have prayed for me, I have received teachings, and seen all kinds of blessings. Because of these blessings I am existing today.



Looking back, I feel I haven't had enough faith and my heart's gratitude to Kami is not enough. You can say all you want with words, but I regret that I couldn't actualize faith enough in my actions. But I am so grateful to Kami-Sama, the ministers, and the church for so many years of blessings.

I was introduced to the church by Mrs. Hisayo Akagi. And through late Rev. Hirayama's kindness and guidance, my husband came to be a devoted member too. So, both of us are able to come to church every day together.

This is the greatest blessing for me. Even if I wanted to go everyday, it wouldn't continue. But because I am pulled, being guided here by Kami, we are able to come to church everyday like this. I am so grateful.

The way to show greatest appreciation to Kami is to help others. I will pray and work each day to become one who is worthy.

8/2001 Newsletter – Faith Story by Mrs. Shizu Akagi

The Akagi family's faith history begins with Mr. and Mrs. Kitaro and Hisao Akagi after they were introduced to Konkokyo through Mr. and Mrs. Moriyasu's guidance.

Their faith cemented when Mrs. Hisayo met and was saved from her sickness by Rev. Bunjiro Hirayama. Receiving this blessing, she became one of the most devout Konko Faith believers in the Portland Church.



After Rev. Hirayama passed away in 1969, Mrs. Akagi and her eldest son, Minoru, (my husband) attended the church every day to take care of it with a few other devout members during its vacancy until Rev. Nobuharu Uzunoe came in May 1972.

My husband Minoru Akagi, devoted to the church just as his mother, was a warm and sincere man. I married to him and raised two sons – Raymond and Randy and Daughter – Linda.

In 1981, I became a Konko faith believer and started life with faith after my husband Minoru passed away just before the church's 50th anniversary. My second son Randy met Tomi Takeda – daughter of Revs. Takeda—at the 50th anniversary, and within the same year, they married.

Seeing these blessings, I wanted to pray more and more for my family, I began taking up early everyday and attended the morning services at church.

Now I am 77 years old. Looking at myself after almost 20 years since I have become a member, I can see that I am following in the footsteps of my mother-in-law and husband. I am grateful for my health—I can still attend morning service everyday, have been able to continue helping with mochitsuki (making rice cakes) every Saturday for almost 15 years, and can still volunteer my time and energy for the many church activities. I am thanking Tenchi Kane no Kami and my ancestors everyday for everything I have today.

I hope that the church will continue to see growth in the future and my loving family will receive blessings to lead them to true happiness.

This is my greatest prayer today.

When Minoru Akagi passed away, Michie Sensei recalls how sad and poor they felt that the current church was not big enough to hold his funeral (their first). It even snowed on that day. As a bigger church was one of Minoru's dreams, they felt his desire as their own.

From that point on, Revs. Nobuharu and Michie Uzunoe were even more determined to find or build a bigger church to accommodate the believers. They took on three jobs including morning newspaper delivery and evening janitorial to help build funds. It took a full year of searching for properties every chance they had before they found the property at 1330 SE 92nd in 1980.

Michie Sensei recalls people asking them why they had purchased property and were moving the church out to an inconvenient location the middle of nowhere. (SE 82nd Avenue was the Portland city limits back then and the new property was ten blocks past it on 92nd Avenue.)

Little did they know that Interstate 205 was in the works and a little less than three years later, "Fully opened in 1983 with the opening of the Glenn Jackson Bridge over the Columbia River."

It is now very conveniently located within ten blocks of Interstates 84 and 205, and just 15 minutes from the Portland International Airport.

Highlights 1972 – 1982

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|------|---|
| 1972 | Rev. Nobuharu Uzunoe becomes official successor to Portland Church |
| 1973 | Michie Sensei ordained as Konko minister |
| 1976 | Rev. Nobuharu Uzunoe succeeds as Second Head Minister to the Konko Church of Portland
- 1 st Mochi machine purchased! |
| 1980 | Purchased new church property – 1330 SE 92 nd Avenue |
| 1981 | - 50 Year Anniversary
- Hosted KCNA Conference @ Suttle Lake
- New church building construction began |

Memorial Service



L to R: Rev. Michihiro Yuasa, Rev. Isao Goto, Rev. Nobuharu Uzunoe

Rev. Nobuharu Uzunoe as Second Head Minister



Hiromae at 1317 NE 3rd Avenue

50th Anniversary (Cosmopolitan Hotel)



L to R: Rev. Michie Uzunoe (lead), Rev. Kisa Yuasa, Mrs. Nobuko Soejima, Mrs. Teru Uzunoe (Rev. Nobuharu's mother), Mrs. Hisako Saito



1330 SE 92nd Avenue – New Church Ground Breaking Ceremony



Rev. Reiko Bingo, In back: Rev. Uzunoe, Rev. Goto, Rev. Yuasa, Jerry Inouye



L to R: Jerry Inouye, Amy Uzunoe, Lori Hamlin, Fumio & Eiko Kuroye, Carrie Saito, Maki Hamada, Mr. Hamlin, Reiko, Mary, & Louise Hamlin



North Wall of Hiromae



R to L: Yomisu Oya (Sensei), Reiko Bingo, Eiko Kuroye, Ben Soejima, Reiko Hamlin, Louise Hamlin, Jerry Inouye, Lori Hamlin, Shizu Akagi, Tomi Akagi, Fumio Kuroye, Hideko Oya (Sensei), Nobuharu Sensei, Raymond (one and only carpenter hired.)

Chapter 3: The Growing Years 1983 – 1994

8/2005 Newsletter - Excerpt from Rev. Michie Uzunoe article

The second 10 [11] years was the start of the growing period...

Things were so different from the first 10 years. I didn't have to run to the bank on Mondays anymore and I finally could separate the church and family accounts. We were able start to seeing the invisible virtue. Slowly, people started to listen and agree to what we said or what we did. After someone broke into the church storage room, I started to pray to receive virtue for this Portland church property—for each grass and each rock. In 1983, we built the church with everybody's help without any debt, but I still had to pray so hard for last payment of \$1,500 for the parking lot. I received the **exact** amount of money the day before the payment was due. We received the blessings that we need, but we had to pray and work so hard each time.



As the Church received more virtue during this period of growth, so did the believers. Unfortunately, most of it remains undocumented. Rev. Nobuharu Uzunoe began the “Konko Spirit Newsletter” in 1999, from which the stories in the next chapters have been preserved. Here are a few stories from this time period that remain.

70th Anniversary Book: Faith Story by Fumio Kuroye

A house takes a lot of work to keep up. Just the other day, our furnace broke down. We called the guy to come fix it, but every time he came, it worked fine, so he didn't know how to fix it. He came five times!



The sixth time we called him, I thought, “This time, I'll tape goshinmai [sacred rice paper] to it.” [Fumio had seen his father use goshinmai in this way before.]

Yes, and when the guy came the sixth time, it was working fine right up until he was about to leave, then it broke again. Because he was here this time, he knew right away what was wrong and fixed it for good.

That's a real blessing. We'll have to remember next time to do it earlier!

[Miho Uzunoe shared later that she fixed her clock that kept stopping no matter how many times she changed the battery by taping Goshinmai above it after hearing about the furnace story!]

5/2011 Newsletter Faith Story by Ben Soejima: The Power of a Prayer!

It all started when I thought I would try to teach Frances how to drive a car. I always heard Frances' mother tell us she would pray for us so nothing would happen. She always said for us to come home early – and what do you know we never had any trouble! But one thing she did one night was stop under the blinking red light at a five-point intersection. Lucky no cars were coming! My mother-in-law was always praying for us that we would be safe wherever we went.



I always liked to go out driving at night. I could tell when a car was coming on an old country road. This happened when I was returning from home from Seattle one night. We were around Kelso, Longview area when I noticed a car light come on under a via-duct on my left side. I told Frances, "I bet it's a cop." Right away Frances said she would pray that everything would be okay. "You pray too Ben." The policeman went past on my left and I thought I'm not the one he's after – then before I knew it, he backed up slowly. I heard a large siren. I thought the police cars stop behind you but this guy stopped in front of me. Before I could start praying a big flashlight was shining in my face. I was so excited I don't remember the first few words he said. I told him I was just going with the flow of all the cars. Then I heard him say, I'm going to let you go. But from now on keep your eyes on the road and the speedometer!" And then did you know I couldn't restart my car! He came back over and said, "Having a little trouble?" The policeman gave me a "jump" and Frances and I were praying all the way home that the car would not stall.

Beware of Radar! One night I received a letter with the return address from the Portland Police Department. Now what? Then I remembered I went out to give my friend a haircut who couldn't get out – so I asked a policeman friend what should I do? He said to write them a letter! Well here it is:

February 7th, 1999 To whom it may concern:

Clinton is acquitted! Soejima is guilty – now Clinton can play golf with O.J. I'm sure I didn't realize I was going that fast – just going with the traffic – the cars today are built to go faster than you think! I consider myself a good driver. My record proves that – first ticket in over fifty years of driving – call my insurance company. Azumano Insurance: 223-9797

This is a good reminder to slow down! From now on I will have to keep an eye on the road and one eye on the speedometer! Yours, Ben J. Soejima

The ticket was \$110. I sent in \$110 and then sent me back \$55! Do you think all the praying by Frances helped? I think it was worth at least \$55!

Nov Vol. 4. No. II - Sacramento Sermon by Rev. Yomisu Oya

...We also enjoyed a great sermon by Rev. [Nobuharu] Uzunoe. A story of a lady that he mentioned in his sermon made me think of the importance of wide, Universal Kami and doing things with Kami when we practice faith.

It was a story about a lady who had a spinal defect that confined her to using a special bed, which prevented her from staying overnight anywhere else besides her home. A year ago, a believer had taken her to a local Konko Church where she was told, "Instead of sleeping on your Gibbs bed, why don't you sleep on a bed of blessings?" From this, she realized that Kami sustains her body and life. Instead of depending on her own power, she should ask Kami for blessings for her spine, and everything else. By the next year, she was able to join an appreciation pilgrimage to Honbu, Konkokyo Headquarters with her church.

For the pilgrimage, the lady wanted to do something extra to show Kami just how much she was grateful for the blessings she received. She loved smoking, so she decided not to smoke during the pilgrimage. After the service, one of her church members offered her a cigarette. Out of habit she took the cigarette and started to light it, forgetting about her own promise to herself. Suddenly, she felt dizzy, and collapsed. When asked, "What's wrong?" she answered, "It's this, it's this," and held out the cigarette. After it was taken from her hand, she felt fine again. She remembered she had decided not to smoke. Yet she thought it was just a thought to herself, she did not promise it to Kami. Then she realized that even if it was just a little thought Kami was listening. Kami had accepted her act of appreciation, and was tapping her on the shoulder to tell her. She also realized that Kami was allowing her to keep her promise. So grateful, she first apologized, and then thanked Kami.

After having returned home, she figured the pilgrimage was over, and so picked up a cigarette. Again, she collapsed. This time, she realized that she had determined her pilgrimage was over, but forgot to thank Kami for allowing her to keep her promise until now. She went to the altar in her home and apologized for forgetting, then thanked Kami again for reminding her and asked Kami to allow her to smoke again. Then she picked up her cigarette and lit it. It was nothing but delicious.

"Till now, people have gone to worship a kami just to request divine blessings, then returned home. They aren't told if they will receive divine blessings or not. But regardless, if they pray singleheartedly, they can receive divine blessings because a blessed Kami-Sama lives in their hearts. Thus, each of you can receive divine blessings by praying individually. Understand this well and practice faith."

(GI: Ichimura Mitsugoro 2:5.1)

Faith Story by Tomiye Akagi

For the first 30 years of my life, I attended services on a regular basis at the Konko Church of Hollywood/Gardena, where I depended on my grandparents and parents to pray for me—my health, school exams, travel, etc.



When I moved to Portland, however, things changed. I knew that my parents, of course, were still praying for me back in California, but I realized that I had to take a more responsible and active role in my faith development. So, with the help of the ministers, I learned how to perform toritsugi on my own—how to give thanks, offer apologies and make requests.

The ministers also taught me that how we express appreciation is also important. For example, you could say, “We went to the beach and had a great time. Thank you, Kami-sama.” However, saying, “Kami-sama, thank you for allowing us to go to the beach and have a great time” shows your appreciation in a slightly different way (and a better way in my opinion).

I came to Portland with a foundation of faith built by my parents and grandparents—practice faith in my daily life, always look for the silver lining and appreciate all blessings large and small.

I am grateful to the ministers of the Portland Church who keep me focused, and who continue to provide guidance and remind me about the teachings of Konkokyo so that my faith continues to develop.

1987—A Pair of Bald Eagles by Rev. Michie Uzunoe. Not too long after Rev. Isao Goto passed away (his wife passed a week earlier) when I was praying at the mitama altar (in Portland Church), I saw a pair of bald eagles with folded wings descend from above into the altar. Immediately knew in my heart Goto Sensei gofusai (Goto husband and wife couple) was praying for us.

He was our parent minister in America. Uzunoe Sensei stayed one year in Hollywood Church, but I only stayed 4 months so I wasn’t particularly close. So I was surprised to know they cared for and prayed for us as parents so deeply. Their prayers and virtue continue to support this Portland Church. Thank you Revs. Isao and Tomoyo Goto.



Revs. Goto, Rev. Nobuharu w/Lisa, Rev. Michie w/ Amy, Rev. Toshiko Kishii w/Takashi at Hollywood

1992 – Seeds Beginning to Sprout by Lisa Uzunoe

As Vice President of our National Honors Society in high school, I was responsible for setting up and promoting the blood drive our senior year.



(Unable to give blood the previous year due to my low iron count, and the nurse telling me “Honey, you need all the blood you’ve got,” I took vitamins and worked hard to make sure I could give the next year.)

As I was leaving early AM, my father came and told me he had a dream I collapsed, so not to give blood today. In a hurry, I probably said okay and left.

However, due to my position, as well as having urged everyone else and some reluctant people several times about what a great cause this was, how could I choose not to give blood?! At the same time, this was the first time (that I can remember) that my father, Rev. Nobuharu Uzunoe, gave me specific instructions from a dream. In dilemma, I kept debating with myself and asking my friends about what I should do. Holding the hand of a friend who was deathly scared of needles but giving blood because I had talked him into it, surely didn’t help! But in the end, knowing Kami sama in my heart (although it wasn’t strong or really formed yet), allowed me to decide to listen to my father’s message.

Which was a good thing for me. Because by the time we finished cleaning/packing up and I finally got home, I was so utterly exhausted that I only remember opening the front door, taking a few steps, then dropping on my knees as they gave out. Woke up (not sure how long later) face down in the middle of the living room doorway with my backpack still in my hands. Oh, papa was right...

Thinking back now, knowing I get hypotension (low blood pressure) at certain times of the month, and the fact that I don’t remember eating or drinking anything that day because it was so busy, I probably was hypoglycemic as well (low blood sugar). Had I given blood, I probably would have ended up in the hospital.

Sometime also that year, before leaving for school, my father told me he had a dream I was pinned under some guy, so be careful. Thinking it was weird, I didn’t dwell on it long and forgot about it. That is, until around lunchtime, when one of my closest girlfriends introduced us to her new boyfriend.

I question her taste, but he didn't seem like a bad guy. But when he looked at me, the smile he gave sent chills down my spine and my father's words flashed in my head. After they left, our group of friends started talking about him, but I was in a state of panic as being raped was my worst fear. Asking me what was wrong, I told them of my father's dream. They all promised to stay close by me throughout the day, and Andy (who was just a close friend then), offered to walk with me the mile home. This continued for the next several days. About a week later, my girlfriend casually told us they broke up (didn't tell her about my dream). Turned out he was a Red Cobra (one of the more cut throat Asian gangs in Portland).

These two incidents stand out as the beginning or awakening of my faith as an individual. It was something tangible, visible, and "real"—not just words or a feeling, or something in a book. They helped me realize how much we are being protected by Kami Sama through the strength of prayer from our parents and families. This was the power of faith and the okekai (Mediation).

Michie Sensei had kind of a similar incident when she was about that age, where she was about to go down the stairs to a subway station when an image of her mother (Rev. Reiko Ishibashi) filled the passageway as if to block it. It wasn't a dream, she was awake and walking. She turned around and went a different way. She said she had a feeling something terrible would have happened to her if she had gone down there that day. It was the first time she realized how much her mother was praying so much for her. [Michie Sensei was raised by her grandmother as her mother, Reiko, went blind after giving birth and was training and being taken care of at the Tsurunomato Church.]

I am very grateful to Kami Sama, my parents and family, for their love and faith which constantly (and for most of us, unknowingly) protects us from "disasters you can't foresee."

Think of Kami as your parent and Kami will think of you as His child. You know that if a child is not with his parent, the child may be bullied. But with the parent, the child will not be bullied. Since you never know when misfortune or disaster will strike, you cannot avoid them even if you want to. But if you have faith while thinking that Kami is your parent, Kami will protect you from disasters you cannot foresee.

(Voice of the Universe#37 / Gorikai II Ichimura Mitsugoro 3-1, 2)

Highlights 1983 – 1994

- 1983 Finished church construction, Dedication Service
- 1984 Rev. Yomisu Oya ordained as Portland minister
- 1985 Rev. Nobuharu Uzunoe becomes KCNA Assist CAM
1st Church Mochitsuki to Anzen (6 machines)
- 1988 Saturday Mochitsuki started
- 1989 Rev. Nobuharu Uzunoe KCNA CAM goyo started (2 terms)
- 1991 60th Anniversary
- 1992 Rev. Hideko Oya ordained as Portland minister
Both transfer to KC Sacramento
Rev. Yomisu Oya Head Minister
- 1994 Revs. Masanori & Kanako Takeuchi transfer to Portland
from Airaku with family, Mitsunori & Hiroko

Neighbor Fair – Yakisoba

(L to R)
Louise Hamlin
Nobuko Soejima
Hisako Saito
Revs. Nobuharu & Michie



Fumio Kuroye crafted the grills by cutting steel barrels in half and adding legs and vents. Then, welding sides and handles to a slab of steel. Jerry Inouye's voice still echo's in our hearts, "Get your hot-off-the grill Yakisoba here!"



Finishing Construction



New Church Dedication Service 1983



(R to L) Rev. Fumio Matsui, Mr. Jerry Inouye, Rev. Takao Kishii, Mr. Umata Matsushima, Rev. Alfred Tsuyuki, Rev. Nobuharu Uzunoe
Rev. Masato Kawahatsu, Rev. Hiromichi Kimura
Rev. Michihiro Yuasa, Rev. Rod Hashimoto, Mr. Yamada (VCR Hokyō),
Rev. Reiko Ishibashi Bingo, Rev. Haruko Ishiwata

Michie Sensei recalls Rev. Matsui drove up with the large sake *taru* (barrel)



Rev. Isa Goto in front of sake,
and Rev. Masaharu Kikegawa
on the very right

Rev. Norikazu Yukawa and
Rev. Richard Grange
were also said to be present

Excerpts from Oregonian Newspaper 1983
Faith, spirit bind congregation: Japanese-based church hopes to grow
by Patrick Rosenkranz, Special Writer



A small religious congregation with an eye to future expansion has built a bigger church to make room for new recruits.

The Konko Church of Portland, established by Japanese families over 50 years ago, is still alive and well, said the group's president, Jerry Inouye, one of the original members.

"I've been coming since I was knee-high," Inouye said. "My dad joined the church in 1931 when I was just a kid." "Our group is small," he admitted, "but we have a real spirit of cooperation."

That spirit is what built the wooden church at 1330 S.E. 92nd Ave., Inouye said. The 25 members pitched in to lay the concrete base, raise the walls, plumb, wire and finish the interior of the building. Construction cost more than \$40,000, which was raised by the local group and other Konko congregations in the United States...

“We feel wonderful about it,” Inouye said. “It may renew our faith. Some people ask why such a small congregation needs a new church. We might meet new people.”

“We don’t care [what race or background people have or] whatever,” said the Rev. Nobuharu Uzunoe, pastor of the church. “There are lots of problems in society and people need help.”

He crossed the altar in his black robes and stockinged feet to sit at a table and looked around his new church.

“If we have a small church, no one comes,” he said. “If we have a bigger, nicer church, more people might be interested in coming.” ...



Caption:
FOR THE ANCESTORS –
Offerings of food and drink
are left on the altar for
ancestors in the newly built
Konko Church of Portland

[Photo is of Kami Altar]



**Farewell Party for
Oya Family**

L to R:

- Rev. Yomisu Oya
- Chika
- Shin
- Yoshie
- Rev. Hideko Oya



Honoring Church Roots

The Konko Church of Fukuoka is the Parent Church of the Konko Church of Portland. Originally, Rev. Michie recalls that because they had to re-establish the church with official paperwork and both her and Rev. Nobuharu were from Tsurunominato Church in Nagasaki, they considered Tsurunominato to be the Parent Church.

However, shortly after Portland's 50th Anniversary, both Revs. Michie and Nobuharu had a growing feeling that something wasn't right.

Through many occurrences, they finally realized that even though relations had discontinued due to Rev. Hirayama's passing, in terms of the church, they needed to honor the Parent Church of the Founding Head Minister above their own.

Making the changes and reaching out to Fukuoka as the Parent Church for the 70th Anniversary, through the fluidity of events and great blessings they received, they truly felt things were in proper order and Hirayama Sensei and Family were beaming with joy.

Respecting the Founding minister activates, nurtures, and connects to us, their virtue.

When the roots are happy, the entire tree will grow strong and healthy.

Photo found with his possessions
Rev. Bunjiro Hirayama's Parent Minister



Third Head Minister of the Konko Church of Fukuoka and his wife
Revs. Tatsujiro & Makoto Yoshiki
Photo dated March 12, 1949

Chapter 4: The Development Period 1995-2005

8/2005 Newsletter - Excerpt from Rev. Michie Uzunoe article

Third 10 years was the development period:

It seemed like we were able to turn most problems into blessings much more quickly than before. And recently, many things were going smoothly and easily by Kami's arrangements. Why? We were trying to practicing faith to follow Kami's wish (not for Kami to follow us), so I believe our requests to Kami became more unselfish. Most of all I could see the church gained more virtue in those years. Just like a rich and well-cared-for garden can grow beautiful flowers even just by seeds falling upon the soil. In 2001, we built the community hall. We all helped again, but the big difference was we had money in advance and were able to finish with joy.

Since I became Head Minister, I go outside to pray before gokinen every morning. I thank Tenchi Kane No Kami for a new life, new day, and give thanks for allowing us to use this property. Then, turn around and pray for the church building, "Please we can get much closer to Kami's wish and receive more virtue for this worship hall, property and the ministers, and members. So the Portland church can help save more people and someday, people are able to receive a peaceful and joyful heart even if they just step onto this property. Hope this property shines Kami's virtue for people who pass by."

1/1995 – To Be or Not to Be Engaged by Lisa Uzunoe

Andy and I had been dating since our senior year in high school. We had entertained the thought of marriage before, but during the winter break our junior year of college, we were cleaning the living room in the church house (for New Year) when we were talking about it again --about whether or not we should get married/engaged.

While cleaning, Andy found a gold twisty tie (he's never seen a gold one before) and jokingly put it on my ring finger. Then looking at each other we thought, "was this a sign?" But gold twisty ties are often on fancy Asian food gifts, so we asked Kami Sama for a more definite sign so we could know for sure. A few days later while cleaning, we found another gold twisty tie, but this time it was three times the width of the first one; just like a male wedding band! I put it on Andy's ring finger, and that's when we decided that Kami Sama was clearly saying to get engaged.

Andy sought mediation and requested permission from my father, and then proposed in front of my family on New Year's Day. We married the summer after graduating... (to sun, rain, winds, and even hail on summer solstice?) My grandmother said if rain solidifies a foundation, with hail, we're stuck for life!



1994 - Rev. Masanori Takeuchi came to Portland to train Excerpt from Sermon from Grand Ceremony May 2021

..Now the **second** Mediation story is when I decided to propagate the Konko Faith in Chicago.

Rev. Nobuharu Uzunoe & his wife, Rev. Michie Uzunoe, upon learning my great desire to do missionary work in America, invited my wife & I to be associate ministers at the Konko Church of Portland. In September 1994, my family moved from Japan to Portland. We trained under the guidance of Revs. Uzunoe for two and a half years to become accustomed to life here in the USA.



In July of 1997 we moved to Chicago to establish a Propagation Hall for serving Kami and people in the heartland of America.

When my family moved to **Portland**, my earnest wish was to establish a Konko church in New York City. But the first priority for KCNA (Konko Churches of North America) was to establish a church in Chicago. At that time, Rev. Uzunoe was the chief administrative minister of KCNA. So, during my training in Portland, Rev. Uzunoe & I always *discussed* where I should go for my missionary work.

Then, 40 days before the 65th Anniversary Celebration of KC Portland we were discussing it again at the Mediation place. So, I sought the Mediation of Rev. Uzunoe. I declared, that during those 40 days I'd do my best to determine the place of my mission, either New York or Chicago.

Then strange things happened one after another. I had three driving accidents. First, I hit the right bumper of my car; and second, the left bumper. Thirdly, in the rain and lost my way, so slowly I tried to enter another road. But suddenly a car rushed in front of me. The bumper of *my* car hit the door of *their* car. To my surprise, a lady came rushing toward me-from her car and shouted, "Are you trying to kill me?" My car did not have any damage needing repair from these three accidents. That in itself was amazing!

Then our new-born baby, Daichi, got sick with a fever of 105 degrees, lasting 5 days. We had no choice but to pray to Kami and renew ourselves. So, we did our best. And, miraculously, he was able to recover. After that, our older son, Mitsunori, also got sick with a fever of 105 degrees and just kept screaming, "*itai – It hurts, it hurts.*" He soon recovered as did his baby brother.

During that 40-day period, I don't think I was able to train myself at least, not to my heart's content. But, through each unexpected event, I realized **with Kami** I was able to train. It was Kami guiding me through each event. Therefore, I felt that I could **not help** but *leave everything* up to Kami. I couldn't do enough on my own. I put faith in Kami, got rid of my desires, and thus allowing Kami to open the way. My wish for doing missionary work in New York was blown away.

After the anniversary celebration of KC Portland, I sought Rev. Uzunoe's Mediation, sharing these thoughts with him. He replied, "Then, you shall go to Chicago to establish a Konko church there." And so it was, in June 1997 my family moved to Chicago. My missionary work in Chicago began Aug. 1st of that year.

My father wrote to me in Chicago.

In his letter he included this line for me:

Chicago is the propagation place for receiving my master's blessings or protection.

He used the pronunciation of Chicago for Japanese words which meant: *the master's protection, or master's blessings.*

Let me explain. *Shi* (of Chicago) means **master**; *Kago* is the **blessings**, or can be **protection**. I'll read it again: ***Chicago is the propagation place for receiving my master's blessings or protection.***

Through those two mediations, the Divine works I had received guided me into the ministry and brought my family to Chicago. As my father put it, with "the blessings and protection of my master", I now serve Kami & people in Chicago.

The appreciation I feel never runs out. Through mediation my life continues to be blessed. The benefits truly are life-changing.

12/1995 – Rev. Michie Uzunoe's Dream

Trying to cross a bridge road over the water, she saw a big town over the ocean. When the water started to cover the road, she tasted the water and remembers saying, "This water is not salty," before waking up.

She realized in February of the following year, that this dream was for Rev. Takeuchi (who at the time was trying to decide whether to propagate in New York or Chicago.) "It wasn't the Ocean, but a Huge Big Lake," and all the buildings she saw was the city of Chicago.

6/1999 Newsletter Excerpt - What I learned by going to HQ by Lisa Uzunoe

It is impossible to write everything I learned during my one-year stay at Konko Headquarters in Japan...What I learned by going to Headquarters that shocked me most, is how much I do not know, how much I have yet to learn.



Brought up in the church, having attended conferences, participating in the Youth Camps, Young Adult Seminars, and even the Faith Training Seminars, I have had a fairly good background to draw from and create my image of the Konko Religion. But like many other youths out there (I think), I never had a good grip of what the Konko Religion was. I could feel it, understand it, and believe in it, but never quite explain it on my own. Read all 3 Gorikais, Founder's Biography, and even memorized the prayers in both Eng and Japanese (not by choice!). However, none of this knowledge really made sense to me. Only my parents' teachings (scoldings) remained with me and made a difference. "Why did the words of our Founder not help me?"

Studying at the Research Center, I realized that the words of my parents derived from those of the Founder. Most of the teachings they taught me to live by, I found in books I had never seen or even heard of before. There were tons and tons of materials about the Konko Religion that were not yet released or published, sitting in the Research Center. My parents never saw these books, yet they knew what was written inside. It was then that I realized that words on a page, by themselves were hard to understand. My parents learned faith through praying to Kami, applied it to their lives, and exposed us to them in context. After studying at HQ, learning the patterns in the teachings and gaining just a little more background English info, I began to understand little by little those "words on the page" on my own.

All of us know our Founder's story, and told to work towards "becoming like Konko Daijin." But we were not taught how he felt, his personality, how he treated his wife and family, or even the situations of those people he gave the various teachings to. All of this information is out there! just not in English. The little bits of information they did have in English were what helped me begin to understand teachings on my own. Our religion is so young; there are piles of materials that have not even been looked through, much less translated. I believe the lack of knowledge and information is a large factor to why we, the non-Japanese speaking/reading youth have a hard time understanding what Konko Daijin is trying to teach us. Hoping to change this, Andy and I have begun to undertake the translation of critical materials into English. By doing so, we found we learned so much more from this effort than any other training or conference/seminar session! We invite everyone, we ask for everyone's help in this effort. Come join us in Japan!

10/1999 Newsletter Excerpt - From the Rising Sun by Andrew Uzunoe

After completing our year of study and training in Honbu, we have moved to Tokyo and are continuing to train at the Konkokyo International Center (KIC). This is definitely a big move for us, for in Konko we were more towards students studying in a University, while in Tokyo, it is pure business! Wearing a suit everyday to work is a new experience for me, and in this heat, one I'd just as soon forget!



We have been assigned many projects, but the biggest is the Guidebook. Together with KCNA we are making three materials to help introduce Konkokyo to the English speaking world. KCNA - a pamphlet and leaflet for basic intro. In Japan, we are making a 100-page book, with a more in-depth intro and study. They should be ready by June of 2000, to commemorate the 100-Year Anniversary of Independence of Konkokyo. Our purpose is not only to have a quality intro book for Konkokyo, but also for our church members. It is designed to give in-depth ideas about many of the aspects of Konkokyo, such as *aiyokakeyo* –“the divine inter-dependence”. As soon as I can figure out how to make a nice web page, we will be putting the book on the net for all to see. This book is challenging, for every person and minister has a different definition or idea about how the book should be put together, and how to explain the various ideas of Konkokyo. However, we would like any and all comments that anyone might have in order to make the book better. The more we look at an idea from the more different points of view, the better we can understand that point and explain it in the book.

As to living in Tokyo, it is one of the greatest cities in the world, and certainly the biggest at 42 million people! It is a nice challenge to get around town, where anywhere you want to go is about 1-3 hours away by local train. However, anything you could ever want, is here, you just have to find it! Living in Konko was such a nice small town, where everyone was friendly and part of Konkokyo. Practicing faith was easy there, and the Honbu Hiromae dominated the town. Our real test came when we have come here. There is not a church nearby (45min by train)[that we knew of at the time], and being all business, it is very easy to forget Kami Sama, the teachings and your *waga-kokoro*. Being jammed into the train, people glaring at me (*gaijin* thing), etc. I have found that to have Kami's heart at all times are very difficult. Being here is very good practice, and I have to remind myself many times everyday that I am supposed to be a minister in training, not a business man. We miss being in Portland with everyone, and definitely miss having a car!

Thank you all for all of your support! Prayers for your health.

1/2000 Newsletter - Divine Blessings to Share by Tomiye Akagi

My mind draws a blank whenever I am asked to share my faith experiences. Nothing out of the ordinary has really happened to me. Can't think of any great "miracles". Haven't had any dreams where ancestors have spoken to me. Don't think Kami has ever tried to give me a sign, either.



Please don't get me wrong, though. I have received an enormous amount of divine blessings. I thank Kami for the health and happiness my family and I have experienced every day. Without those blessings, life would be pretty miserable. I am also grateful that Kami has protected me from terrible accidents, because I have had some near misses. My husband and I have jobs we like. The kids are doing well in school. Life is good.

For the past month, I have been asking myself, "What divine blessings have I received that are worth sharing with other people?" Finally, I realized that the blessings I consider "ordinary" really aren't. It's just that I have received so many blessings that my life is easy. Everything is good, and when everything is good, the good seems ordinary. Rating blessings as "ordinary" or "excellent" is all relative. If I weren't able to walk, walking would be a miracle. If my body were in pain, just think how grateful I would be if I woke up one morning, able to move around with ease. If I were starving, I would be so appreciative of the smallest bit of food. To have "miracles" usually means having something terrible happen first. We should be grateful for small things.

Thinking further about my faith and blessings, I came to another realization. An even greater blessing that I have received, and which many others of you have also received, is the awareness of and belief in Tenchi Kane no Kami. Kami blessed my family with the Konko faith. That faith has been passed along to me; and through Kami's guidance, I am passing it along to my children. My hope is that my children will pass it along to their children and grandchildren.

Without faith, I would not be aware of *aiyokakeyo* or the importance of toritsugi; nor would I be practicing faith in my daily life. I sincerely believe that without my faith, life would not be so wonderful.

Perhaps the most basic blessings—faith, health and happiness—are truly the greatest.

3/2000 Newsletter – My Divine Blessing by Rev. Amy Uzunoe

When I think of divine blessings, I think about blessings I'm already receiving, like the air I breathe, food I eat, and family I have and love. There are also other blessings if I realize and appreciate them. I try to practice faith daily and cleanse my heart. My goal is to become a person with a pure heart—heart of Kami. My father has always taught me that a kind, compassionate heart is important in life and faith. Through reading about the Founder's life and teachings, he has also taught me to have a Kami heart—one of kindness, compassion, care, love, & conscientiousness for others.



Everyday, I am faced with certain problems. It may be being irritated by Willy, who was, well, being Willy. Maybe I got into an argument with family, or things not going well at work. We tend to look at the negative side because it is easier to notice. Negative mood, attitude of one's selfishness, arrogance, prejudice--such things stain and affect the hearts of those around us as well. Sometimes I think it is no wonder how easily we can build a world of hate, crime and war. I often hear myself complaining, and see how my heart can easily get irritated which then leads to anger; how I am selfish because things didn't go the way I wanted; or how arrogant I am not to see how I affect those around me. I practice faith by trying to realize what divine blessings I am already receiving from Kami, because I tend to take everything for granted. Like, if I didn't have a family, I wouldn't be able to argue at all. How lonely I would be.

I believe that a heart of appreciation is very important. We cannot forget the divine blessing we have already and those we are receiving continuously. Through my experiences, I have learned that directing my heart toward Kami by practicing a heart of appreciation in everything I do and have leads to a heart of kindness, compassion, forgiveness, and conscientiousness. When I start to appreciate things from the basic air we breathe, car we drive, jobs we do have, to the life I have at this moment, I begin to lose space for my complaints. It never fails me, because every time I start to realize and truly appreciate how blessed I am, I start to feel very happy. But, I always fail to receive divine blessings when I don't continuously practice faith.

To me, the happiness I build in my heart from practicing faith is the cleanser for all my dispositions. I became a minister because, through the help and prayers of my parents, I have seen how wonderful I felt to see people when they are truly happy. How happy I was when I saw those around me happy. Everything and everyone seems so harmonious, kind, and sincere when everyone has a happy heart and mood. It may take time for me to constantly practice a faith of appreciation, forgiveness, being open minded about everything. But this is practicing faith, something to obtain in my daily goal, to pray everyone will realize and fulfill for everyone's own peace and happiness.

4/2000 Newsletter – My Story of Divine Blessings by Randy Akagi

When I learned that I had to write an article about Okage, I found that this assignment presented me with a problem. Of course, there was always the possibility of writing about the divine blessings in my family, in my work, in my relative good health and all the usual things that happen in a person's daily life. All these topics are very near and dear to my heart.



In several discussions I have had with Uzunoe Sensei, it was mentioned that all people receive divine favors in daily life. It didn't matter if they were Konko believers or not; so where did that leave me in developing my faith and my perception of divine favor in the first place? All very confusing!!

I have to believe that, after some further thought, the importance of recognizing Okage and appreciating it are a foundation of our religion, and this attitude shapes the way we live our lives and deal with daily problems. Appreciation of Okage can be difficult at times, in that outwardly events could appear stressful or involve deep personal loss, but what may be Okage for one individual may not appear that way to another. All this shows me that my studies are not yet finished and I really am a work in progress.

In developing my faith further, I hope that the confusion will diminish in time, and I guess that alone will be Okage enough. I look forward to a deeper understanding of divine blessings and I hope also that I can become stronger in my faith life.

For my Okage experience, I would have to choose my motorcycle accident. I know, you're probably saying what is he thinking? How can an accident be Okage? It's just a matter of point-of-view. I was on the way to a friend's house, riding on a two-lane street with parked cars on both sides, when I noticed a Volkswagen bus pulling out of a side street. The corner the bus was emerging from was partially hidden by a pickup truck with a camper. Having seen him, I slowed slightly, thinking I could move around behind him. Unfortunately, he was pulling a wooden-sided trailer. I found out that in a competition between a bike rider and a trailer, the rider loses.

I later determined that I received Okage twice in one event. The first was that it was a wooden trailer, and that the wood flexed when my body bounced off of it. Not being killed is not really a bad thing. The second Okage was the minor injury to my foot, which kept me laid up for a week. It was enough to remind me to be more careful, and I really was appreciative of the blessing to be able to learn from my mistake.

5/2000 Newsletter- Divine Blessings by Teresa Jackson

I believe that the teaching, "Divine blessings depend upon one's own heart" is a very important part of faith. When I became pregnant with Daniel, Dan and I were very grateful to Kami-Sama for this great divine blessing—the opportunity to have a child. However, my faith really grew when he almost died.



When Daniel was two months old, he started throwing up everything he ate. As babies often vomit, we were not too worried at first, but it continued for a few days. He soon quit having bowel movements, and hardly urinated. Became worried, and when we saw a spot of blood in his diaper, rushed him to ER. By the time the doctor examined Daniel, his eyes had sunken into his sockets, and his ribs were projecting out. He was hardly even moving!

We prayed to Kami-Sama wholeheartedly, and left Daniel in Kami-Sama's hands. We naturally wanted to do something to help him, but we felt utterly helpless as there was nothing we could do. It took an agonizing five hours to get the x-rays and test results back from the lab. They found that Daniel's stomach muscles had expanded, hence blocking his esophagus, and keeping him from being able to drink milk. The milk not being able to reach his stomach is what was caused him to vomit. He had to have surgery. Being so small, we were worried sick about how surgery with a two-month-old baby would turn out! With Kami's Blessings, we came through the surgery well, and the procedure was a success. But we were only half-way to his recovery.

Feeding Daniel was very hard, we had to feed him in only small increments. The first hour we had to give him only 10ml of milk from a bottle, hardly anything. 4 hrs later, we were allowed to feed him 20ml. 4 hrs after that, 35ml and so on. If he threw up during any of those feedings, we had to start all over. The doctor said if he successfully reached 45 ml of milk without incident, then he could return home. We prayed and started feeding Daniel, but soon threw up. Tried again, only to have the same result. I was heartbroken and thought we would never be able to return home. The nurse who was helping us suggested that I breastfeed instead of using the bottle; that mother's milk has special blessings from the breast. I tried that as soon as we could—he never threw up again. We were in the hospital for five days before we could go home. I was so happy to be able to leave and return home with my healthy son!

We are so grateful to Kami-Sama that our son is now alive and well. The teaching, "Divine favor depends upon one's own heart" really rings true for me. Even though we were very worried about Daniel, we knew that Kami-sama would help us even through our hard times. Kami-Sama's blessings truly depend upon one's own heart.

6/2000 Newsletter - Divine Blessings to Share by Kuris Inouye

Everyday I know I'm receiving divine blessings. I have a wonderful life, a great career with Waddell & Reed - helping people achieve their financial goals, and loving family.



There was a time just before when Nicolas was born that I prayed wholeheartedly to Kami. Jenny was pregnant & was going into labor at the hospital. She was in labor for about 11 hours before a serious situation started to happen. Nicolas' heartbeat was dropping and all of the monitors started to sound off - lack of oxygen. Then about 7-8 doctors/nurses rushed in to find out what was going on. Fortunately, Jenny's doctor was on call - he came in immediately and took over to perform an emergency C-section. Within seconds, Jenny was wheeled off to have the surgery.

At first the head nurse wasn't going to allow me to be with Jenny. But, her doctor who did the emergency surgery stepped in and allowed me to be right there with Jenny. It was a very scary situation - all I could do was to pray to Kami sama for his protection and guidance.

Nicolas was born 7 lbs. 15 oz. with no medical or physical problems to him or to mom. The only drawback for Jenny is she has a long and permanent birthmark from Nicolas. We do have a lot to be thankful for.

Mini Sermon – Exact Change by Lisa Uzunoe. Before returning home from our exchange program in Sapporo, Andy and I were going to visit Gohonbu and parent churches in Fukuoka and Nagasaki. Somewhere along the trip, we had 5 bills left: 50,000 yen (basically \$500) to return from Nagasaki to the airport in Tokyo, so we were in good shape. But my mother sent word that she wanted us to visit these other churches, including one on Shikoku Island. Each church = 10,000 yen offering. Five churches = 0 yen left!

Deciding to fulfill her wishes, we figured we had rail passes so we could actually sleep in the shinkansen instead of hotels and make do with a rice ball or two for a few days until we flew out. We actually had a few envelopes we were given by church ministers we had already visited (and even from their believers) as “allowance for traveling students”, but decided we wouldn't open those until we were in desperate need-should be enough.

After visiting all of the churches requested, we did run out, completely. Opening the many envelopes we had collected, to our complete and utter amazement, it totaled 50,000 yen **exactly**. We even counted it several times. That can only be Kami Sama's divine arrangement and message of approval.

8/2000 Newsletter – My Greatest Divine Blessing by William Thomas Chin

We are always taught and reminded about the countless and endless divine blessings, which we receive. Through “informal” lectures from my wife, sermons from ministers and personal realization of the divine blessings, which surround us, I am striving constantly to look for and appreciate the divine blessings which surround us. At times, the search for these divine blessings are short; however, there are times which the search and realization of divine blessings can take an entire lifetime or longer.



There are times which I have followed the short path in the realization of divine blessings, and there are times which I think that I will not understand and receive divine blessings until the day that “hell freezes over.”

However, I am thankful of one divine blessing (I think that realization of it is a divine blessing in itself!), which has abruptly surfaced, as my greatest divine blessing to this day. The divine blessing, which I think I have a firm grip on, is the fact that I am going to be a parent.

I don't know if our child is going to view me as a divine blessing; she will probably view me as a divine discipline! Anyway, how is it that becoming a parent to me is a divine blessing? I will be happy to explain.

My greatest divine blessing is actually a combination of many divine blessings, which have accumulated over the past nine years. The divine blessing of the love which Amy and I share, the divine blessing of finishing college, the divine blessing of getting a job, the divine blessing of my wedding last year, and the list goes on forever.

Through all the blessings I have received, now, Kami has given Amy and I the divine blessing of our unborn child. I realize that it is up to our faith in Kami and love for each other to grow as a happy family.

I hope and pray that the pots of divine blessings are not empty. Becoming a parent is a big challenge for me and I am sure going to need all the divine blessings there are!

9/2000 Newsletter – My Divine Blessing by Erin Akagi

I have so many divine blessings, so it would be absolutely impossible for me to list them all.

Everything is a divine blessing. Even things that some people would consider a misfortune or a mistake. Bad things can also be good because we learn from what we do wrong.



The blessings that stand out the most to me are things like: life, food, shelter, air, family, and health. But those things are just as important as education, fun, friends, and love.

Do you see what I mean? The list is so endless; I can't even name the most obvious blessings because each one is important. And each of those blessings have little blessings in that subject.

For example, education is a blessing, but teachers, books, schools, classrooms, paper, pens, etc. are all part of how we get our education.

Since there are so many blessings, it would be difficult to chose just one divine blessing out of all the blessings we receive everyday.

But if I were to choose one, I would have to say that I am most grateful for the ability to realize the blessings I receive.

If I'm able to realize my divine blessings, then I also have the ability to appreciate them.

Some people aren't able to see what they have, and so they can't be thankful for what they have either.

I'm also thankful that I can see how lucky I am to not be able to list all of my blessings. That means that I have so many, and that I understand how important they are.

10/2000 Newsletter – My Divine Blessing by Dan Jackson

When Sensei asked me to write an article on myself about divine blessings, I was stumped because there are so many I have received, I cannot just write one as an example.

I am eternally grateful for the health of my family, especially my little boy. But I decided to write about an experience I just had a week ago.



My brother and I decided to go set up some stands (which are sitting areas) for hunting next week when deer season opens. While we were setting up a stand we were looking down, and about 50 yards out we spotted a 6-foot tall 11'000 lbs bull elk. Since my brother had a bow tag and a bow, he was going to try to get him. So my brother decided to circle to the left, and I circled to the right to try to push the elk towards my brother.

Well, my brother tried to pull back on the bow and spooked him. So, the elk ran towards me without me knowing. I was walking through the tall grass noticing many elk beds when I noticed the trees to my left were moving a lot.

So, I pulled out my knife and waited in anticipation praying to Kami Sama not knowing what was coming. Then I saw this magnificent creature another huge bull elk with antlers 3 feet above his head. He was so huge and tall, and when he came out of the trees we were standing eye to eye. We just glared at each other for over two minutes.

Meanwhile I was thinking that all the elk had to do was charge, which is very common, and it would be like a car hitting a child. Again I prayed to Kami Sama and clenched the knife.

I decided to yell at the elk **“Come On!”**

Thank goodness he was more scared of me than I was of him and he decided to gallop right in front of me even closer and veered left toward the trees.

Oh boy, was I happy he decided not to charge and thanked Kami Sama again for letting me live another day.

Maybe Kami Sama decided it was not my time to die.

12/2000 Newsletter – My Divine Blessing by Andrew Uzunoe

There have been so many life-changing experiences for me throughout my life, and especially in the past four years, that to be able to write a short faith experience is very difficult. Kami-sama has continued to teach me at every turn about faith, and has given Lisa and I an abundance of blessings. One of the greatest blessings that I received recently, one that really enabled me to increase my understanding of faith (with a little help from Rev. Uzunoe and Rev. Michie) was the blessing of life.



Four years ago when I really started trying to develop my faith, I had no idea about how to truly practice faith. I thought that praying everyday was a good first step. And it was, but it was only the first step. I would pray every morning, about all the things that were happening in my life. I would ask for help, or for recovery from illness for myself or for my family members. This was fine, but I was soon taught that “faith is not a miracle or magic.” In this I mean that I could not just pray for a specific thing for five minutes a day and expect great, incredible results. Just like with basketball, if I only shot hoops for only five minutes a day, I would never get anywhere or be any good. To truly receive more blessings, I had to do more, pray harder, for a longer time each day.

I was finally able to realize this when my father was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer in June of 1998. The doctor told him less than 5% of such people live over six months. I was worried as he started preparing for his death. He set up his funeral, and made sure his life insurance and will were finalized. I was in Japan at this time, and could not move back, for I was attending the seminary and studying at the research center. I was very worried about him, but had no option but to pray to Kami Sama, asking for help. I prayed everyday for him, every time we prayed. And at the seminary, that was a lot!

Well, December came and went. Though my father's health went down hill, he was still alive, and able to function almost normally. I was so happy that I would write to him, and call him when I could. My father himself prayed in his own way, and was able to start to change his heart, enabling himself to receive the blessings Kami Sama was trying to give him.

Another year passed, and we were able to go to America on a business trip from KIC. By this time my father was a little weak in body, but still sharp mentally. He was talking about being alive still, but that he could die any day now. I thought about the teaching Konko Daijin said, “Don’t prepare for death. Do preparations for living. When you die, you will only return to the ground” (VU#60). And also the one that says, “I told Konko-Sama, ‘With my sickly health condition, I can’t help thinking that my life won’t be long.’ Konko-Sama taught, ‘Humans are unable to predict human life spans. Kami’s

blessings are unlimited, so practice faith, accumulate divine virtue and live a long life” (vU 142). My father seemed to be sure that he was going to die, and did not focus on the fact that he was still alive and able to be with family. This blessing of life was the greatest blessing he was receiving.

When I came back for the business trip, I sought Mediation from Rev. Uzunoe. At that time he told me that through prayers and effort, my father was receiving blessings. But more than that, because I was doing religious duties (*Goyo*) for Kami Sama, my family was able to receive blessings. I felt that my faith was small and weak, and I could not possibly be strong enough to save anyone. It was then that I was made to realize that praying was not enough. I guess I was right, my prayers weren't strong enough, and not enough, but I was doing more than I realized. I was doing Kami's work by training in Japan to help develop Konkokyo in America, learning about faith and developing it. Because I was trying hard to do Kami's work, and was relying on Kami completely for my father's health, Kami Sama was taking care of the rest for me. In this way, I was doing all I could to help my family, and through this, all of us were able to receive blessings!

My father is still holding strong today, two years after he was diagnosed to pass way. I have found that if I really want to help people, I need to make sacrifices. Just practicing faith and praying for people when it is convenient will never render blessings, and I will not be able to help anyone. I must practice faith, harder each day, pray with more sincerity, pray longer, do all the work I can for Kami, and give up my own selfish desires to be able to help others. If I were unwilling to give up my own desires, from Kami's point of view, I would not appear to really be concerned about helping whom I was praying for. If I was to do everything I could, sacrifice my needs for the sake of helping others, then I could gain enough faith and trust from Kami to be able to be of use in helping others.

This is my goal as a minister in training—to be able to increase my faith, and to be allowed to do more of Kami's work so that I can help people save themselves. Through my father's sickness, my family has received great blessings to be able to have him still with us today, and a great lesson to learn from so that I can learn how to help others around me. Thank you to everyone who has helped me gain all that I have gained. I still have a long way to go, but with the help of all of you, and especially Kami Sama, I will do my best.

Addendum: My father passed away on Memorial Day 2012. 14 years after he was diagnosed to die, on the only holiday he celebrated, and after being able to see seven grandchildren grow.

Michie Sensei said she even saw his face while she was in the hospital, telling her, “Thank you for living” (to help continue to teach me). She said you have to have a lot of virtue to be able to appear like that. Thank you Kami Sama.

2/2001 Newsletter - My Divine Blessing by Michele Fukawa

Since I was a young child, my mother always insisted that I attend church—especially during cleaning days prior to the Godaisai. She said that doing goyo [duties] for the church is to give thanks for the blessings we have received and to ensure that we continue to receive blessings. As I review the events in my life, I realize that this teaching has not been lost on me.



When I think about my faith now, I do not think about the church, or prayer, or even Toritsugi--instead, I think about my work in the homeless shelter. I acknowledge that this may sound sacrilegious, but please understand that people have many different ways to express their faith. For me, listening to and advising a homeless man on drug programs or food stamps has become my form of goyo, and my way of living the teachings of Konkokyo.

One teaching which has always stood out for me is about catching sparrows. In Akashi, they were catching sparrows by using a crow for inducement (bait?). The crow was tied to a stick and bird feed was scattered in front of it. Feeling safe because of (from?) the crow, the sparrows came. Then they throw nets and caught the sparrows. I thought this was a cruel thing to do. Konko Sama said, "A heart that feels compassion is the heart of Kami." (Kondo Fujimoi: II, 17)

Compassion for those who are helpless and fragile comes naturally for most of us. We automatically comfort a crying baby, or feed a stray cat. The situation for homeless men and women are equally dire, but many people only notice their drug addiction, their smells, their dirtiness. We put blame on the person for his/her own situation--and of course, part of that is true. However, they are also merely sparrows tangled in a net of drugs, mental illness, broken families, and apathy--and every single one of them deserves compassion and help.

I was case managing "Jim" six months ago. He was a bearded, disheveled man in his 40's, who did not have good hygiene. If he was on the bus, most people would avoid sitting near him. Multnomah county had been paying for his stay at a Single Room Occupancy (SRO) in downtown Portland, but his county doctor could not extend his stay any longer. Jim was a severe alcoholic and a heroin user, and has been diagnosed with clinical depression; as a result his doctor vouchered him into an SRO while Jim stabilized on his anti-depressants and entered a drug treatment program. When I met with him, Jim was extremely hopeful for the future, and felt good about being clean and sober. Three months later, however, Jim fell into a depression and started

using alcohol and drugs again. He landed in the city's detox center & we never heard from him since.

Jim is a good decent naive and he would often talk my ear off about the different housing he wanted to live in. Jim also had grown children who he hoped to see again, and county social workers advocating for him. He was very honest about his addictions and depression, and how they have named his life. Until his relapse, Jim would often attend two AA or NA meetings daily.

Jim's story is a common one in our shelter. Most people come in with great hopes of getting back on their feet and improving their lives, but many stumble and fall while reaching for this goal. When we discuss these cases in the shelter, our hearts simply ache. And this sorrow is not because we have failed--it is because these men and women are now sleeping on the streets, being arrested or harassed by the police, thieving, ruining their health and risking their lives ... and until they return, we are unable to help them.

The teachings of Konkokyo have always encouraged me to look upon others with compassion, and to help those in need. And now, I am lucky enough to be paid a salary to fulfill this teaching on a daily basis. On average, I have 30 homeless men on my caseload who I meet with on a weekly basis. And although it is difficult and heartbreaking work, it is among the homeless that I am constantly learning more about having a heart of Kami.

One of the hardest things that I'm learning is that compassion must often exist in a vacuum (not the Hoover type). For example, in the beginning, I was often upset that I spent so much time, energy, and emotion on someone, who did not seem grateful at all. When I complained to my co-worker, he told me that we are not in this profession to receive thanks or to feel good about ourselves—we are here to help those who cannot help themselves. And truthfully, this is very difficult to do. After all, when you help someone, you expect a thank you or a simple acknowledgement. When I didn't receive this, I felt hesitant in opening my heart and spending time with other clients. I felt especially reluctant in having compassion towards clients who weren't serious about changing their lives. Now, I try to remember two things: 1) True compassion must be without expectations of reward, and 2) True compassion is understanding that pain is often masked by anger and apathy, and thus, people who exhibit this are in need of the greatest compassion.

My journey of faith has now taken me to a place that constantly tests my heart and, hopefully, strengthens it. As a result, I strongly feel that getting involved with the underprivileged in our community is a good way to live through the teachings of Konkokyo, and I will support any effort that our organization makes in reaching out to those in need.

5/2001 Newsletter – An American Home Again by Rev. Richard Dusek

Hi, I'm Dick Dusek. My wife is Miya. We came from Fukuoka, Japan, to work in the KCNA.



I joined the Konko faith in Japan 19 years ago. I was attending an English teachers' conference being held at Airaku Church and on the third day ended up meeting the head minister. I had heard enough to respect him highly. He was sitting Japanese style at the mediation desk.

He told me this was the start of a relationship and extended his hand to me with palm down. I couldn't understand what for. But with a deep sense of courtesy I placed a respectful kiss on the back of his hand (as to greet a Catholic Bishop). Shocked, he jerked his hand back. That was my first step into the faith.

Five years ago I was ordained a Konko minister and trained at Airaku Church with my wife till recently. Arriving in Portland on the 17th of April, we moved into the house on Yamhill St. We walked into a house which was completely empty, but blessings began to fill it step by unmistakable step: bed, sofa, groceries; introduction to shops, minute advise, and even a car at better than bargain price. This is the physical side.

The Spirit is also moving in amazing rhythms. For example, when we start to go somewhere or do something, someone just happens to be there to assist us. Just a few days ago, my mother came down from Tacoma and we got lost looking for Fred Meyer's. Stopping at Albertson's I paged Teresa Jackson—she's an employee there. Teresa was there, but it was actually her day-off. She just happened to be there and was very helpful. Surprising? That's just one of the examples. Think of blessings like this happening day after day. I never grow tired, enjoying the unexpected blessings of divine arrangements.

We left our four grown children in Japan. They may join us later when they choose. They keep us informed through e-mail. My family is quite large—10 brothers and 3 sisters. Most of them live in the Tacoma area. A few of them came out to greet us at the airport, and even helped move furniture in from storage. Then The Spirit moves again, and one asks if we might need a chest-of-drawers they happen to have in their van. It now stands in our bedroom.

We are looking forward to sharing our blessings with you. What appeared to be empty is being filled. The heart once it opens, also is filled.

There's no limit to the blessings of an open spirit. Blessings do depend on the heart. Shift the heart and open it for endless blessings.

8/2001 Newsletter – Faith is Not Magic Sermon by Rev. Lisa Uzunoe

... Lately, it seems like the church and our whole family is buying new big things—Rev. Michie bought the new van for church, Dan bought a new car, Andy bought a house, and now Willie’s new truck. Anyone looking at the church and our family now, may think we have lots of money and can buy things easily. But there’s a reason for it.

Thinking about this reason reminded me of a similar conversation about the church extension I had with Rev. Michie when I first came back from Japan. She was saying that from an outsider’s view, it may look like the Church was able to buy and build the extension easily; they marveled at how nice it was and how fortunate we were. However, they only saw the end result—how it was built in one year. They didn’t know about the way we worked at making mochi (sweet rice cakes) every year for 14 years, and just as many years of making mochi every Saturday that it took to build up this money. It didn’t take 1 year—it took 15 years of everyone’s hard work to build this extension.

Thinking about what she had said that day, I feel our family now is receiving blessings in the same way. There’s a lot of work behind the scenes. Before, when I was growing up, we didn’t have new things. We didn’t have much money at all. But Revs. Nobuharu and Michie always worked hard (at one time, both worked three jobs) to be able to make offerings to parent churches.

The hard work from all of those years is something people now don’t see. Michie sensei bought a new van, but the last van we had was donated 25 years ago. Dan and Teresa bought a house and recently a new car, but they’ve had to work many hours of overtime. Andy and I bought a house but Andy’s been working 18-20+hrs a DAY. And Willie and Amy bought their new truck, but right before Willie came to show us on Friday, Rev. Michie was just telling me how stretched his department at work was and Willie pushed himself too hard to make up for it.

Thinking about where our blessings came from, I realize how true Rev. Nobuharu Uzunoe’s words were when he said, “Faith is not magic. Blessings are not magic. You get as much as you work for.” It also depends upon your purpose, whether it is out of greed or a grateful and giving heart. But this doesn’t start right away. You can’t expect to receive blessings just because you work hard. It is like our Founder taught us,

When you don’t receive any divine blessings even while practicing faith, don’t wonder why and be regretful. For example, if you fertilize your barley, come January you may not notice any difference with the crops that weren’t fertilized. But in spring, the crops you fertilized will turn out well. It is the same for when you practice faith. Do it with an upright heart, without neglect. (Selected Teachings pg. 37)

From the efforts, faith, generosity for other, and virtue that our ancestors have built up from five generations ago, our family and church members today are easily able to receive blessings for everything we do. Should any of us forget this, or believe we did it all on our own, receiving those same blessings will become much, much harder.

This faith treasure, this virtue I have received, I hope to pass on to my children, to everyone around me, and down through many more generations to come. I hope and pray that all of you too, are or soon will receive blessings just as easily.

Please continue to study and practice developing your faith with the assurance that you and your family will reap a great harvest in the future. Thank you.

2001 Mini Sermon – Please Give Us a Sign by Rev. Lisa Uzunoe

Andy and I were thinking we should buy a house in the near future and started looking. But there was also the Pilgrimage to Honbu in the fall, we couldn't afford to do both. One day discussing it with him I felt, "we have to decide today, before the flight prices go up." We prayed, "Kami Sama, please give us a sign." There was a house for sale a block away from the church but was a bit higher than we wanted, so decided we'll make our offer anyway and if they accept, we'll take it as a sign to buy house, if not, then buy flights.

On my way to the house (to get the realtor's number), there was a new sign pointing to the right. That wasn't there before. The house my father had been wanting for years was for sale, and was lower than the price we were offering the other house. Immediately called the realtor who said he had just put the sign up that morning and was available. Met with him and made our offer. But we hadn't done anything with financing (didn't even know how much we could borrow), but said no problem and gave us a card—go see my guy here, he'll figure it out while I take your offer to the owner.* By 5pm that evening everything was signed and I was calling my father, "Hi Papa, I just bought a house... is that ok?" Found, financed, and bought a house in ONE day.

We had asked for a sign. Kami Sama sent us an actual, physical sign! And everything went amazingly smooth.

(*We had an extra \$2,000 to put down on the house because I had not yet called our bank to complain and ask why our automatic \$1,000 extra we were paying on our car hadn't gone through the last two months.)

AND with Grandma Bingo's help, we were able to go on the pilgrimage after all!



9/2001 Event – Recollection excerpt from sermon for Tsurunominato Church Ikigami Konkō Daijin Grand Ceremony 2020. By Rev. Michie Uzunoe

...I would like to share one of these blessings that for me was **unforgettable**. My husband, Rev. Nobuharu Uzunoe ended his 30 years here in Portland in April of 2001 after Portland Church's 70th Anniversary. In July, he officially moved to Gardena Church as successor to our parent minister in America, Rev. Isao Goto, after his passing.



Four months after I became HM that year, one day during my morning gokinen prayer, I received an unusually detailed revelation. I was told, *“Purchase eight candle holders. Place the candles outside the front doors, four on each side.”* Cocking my head in wonder, I ended up asking Amy Sensei who had come to worship at the church to purchase these candles. (She was living close by at the time.) When she asked why, I said, “I don’t know, but Kami sama instructed to.” I remember the preparations were sometime before 11am.

Then, Amy, who had gone home, called and said “Mom, turn on the TV **now**.” This was when I found out about the Twin Towers incident on that September 11th day. The Mayor of Portland called out to have a city-wide candle vigil at 5pm. Everyone scrambled to purchase candles, and stores were sold out. But as I had been instructed by Kami Sama, I was prepared and able to remain calm. We held the candle vigil with candles placed outside the doors at 5pm.

Small-witted as I am, I never understood why it was four candles on each side. Then suddenly one day, two years later, realized that as the Yatsunami represents the eight directions of the compass, and thus for the mitama who passed away suddenly or confused mitama from sudden death, the candles would guide them from anywhere in the universe.

Since then, to this day, we use these eight candles for the invitation service the evening before the Spring and Autumn memorial services. But this is an example of a blessing from Kami that was very clear...

“Blessings people can see” might sound like bragging. However, by being able to receive blessings that are beyond coincidence or doubt, we can show troubled people, and others who hear about them can also share them with people around them. In this way, even more people can receive blessings.

For this reason, don’t just make selfish prayers or receive self-fulfilling blessings (which are blessings that only you see as a blessing), but a true blessing that is a blessing no matter who sees it...

10/2001 Newsletter – Faith Story by Michiakzu Koshiba

Hi, I'm Michikazu Koshiba. I came from Tokyo, Japan. I am a junior majoring in physics and studying psychology at Waseda University. My father is the Head Minister of the Sugunami Church in Tokyo. He and Rev. Uzunoe have known each other for a long time, so I have been staying at the Portland Church for the past three weeks. I'm very pleased with this stay. And I'm so full of gratitude to many people for many things.



At the beginning of July, it was decided that I would come here. Back then, I thought I would only learn English in Portland. But as the day came to go to America, I unconsciously began to regard this stay as the time to think over what I will do with my life from now.

In fact, during my stay I went to Mt. Hood, Newport, Lewis & Clark College and so on. I had a lot of good and pleasant experiences. And moreover, I had a lot more valuable experiences through talking with Rev. Michie, Rev. Andy, Rev. Lisa, and Rev. Dusek, through serving the Portland church, and praying everyday.

In Japan, I served the Sugunami Church only when I was asked to by my parents, and prayed to Kami only when services were held. But now, I'm feeling gratitude for praying, serving the church and so on—for everything. I think this kind of gratitude is what makes my life much happier and much more meaningful. And also this was what I didn't feel in Japan. Seeing and talking with people at the Portland Church, I feel the work of a minister is very wonderful! I couldn't think these things in Tokyo.

From now, after I return to Japan, I want to study psychology more and more and contribute to improving care systems for children treated cruelly by neurotic parents and for the parents themselves.

I hope to make good use of these experiences in the future. I'll come back here as a student...or as minister. I don't know about that yet. By then I'll have grown up much more. I'm looking forward to seeing you again.

Thank you.

12/2001 Newsletter - Highlights From Our Pilgrimage & Appreciation Trip by Kurtis Inouye & Randy Akagi

Great Buddha Temple grounds, Kyoto

It all started on Oct. 26th through Nov. 8th, 2001, from Tokyo, Takayama, Fukuoka, Hiroshima, Shodo Island, Konko Town, Nara & Kyoto. It was the first time my wife (Jenny Inouye), my sisters—Sherrie Inouye and Karen, and her husband Frank Sunada, has ever been to Japan. One of the high-



lights was experiencing the Fukuoka Church's 110th Anniversary with Randy Akagi, mother Shizu Akagi, and Revs. Nobuharu, Andrew, and Lisa Uzunoe. We also had a chance to meet with the Spiritual Leader, Konko Heiki-sama for *Toritsugi* [Mediation] in Konkokyo Headquarters. Finally, we all enjoyed the *onsen* [hot springs] which was a wonderful and relaxing experience.

– Kurtis Inouye

During our trip to Japan, we received so many blessings. I can't list them all, but let me share a few with you.

The travel conditions were perfect. Not only did we enjoy great weather the entire time we were there, our travel connections were so smooth.

Many times our train or an earlier one showed up right as we got there so we didn't have to wait, and gave us extra time to shop later. The one time it really rained, it stopped right as we got out of the bus at the Heian Shrine and were blessed with a rainbow—a double rainbow, almost perfectly centered above the Shrine. Our tour group had to cancel plans to see certain shrines and other gardens, but that was when we (Portland Church group) were on our side trips to attend the services, so we didn't miss anything!

The tour was by bus, but our side trips allowed us to use the entire train system—from the small locals to the bullet trains. That was one of the neatest things—to be able to break apart from the tour and walk around the neighborhoods in Japan, join in and see the everyday life instead of just the tourist attractions. Then there was Konkokyo Headquarters. We were able to go on a tour of Konko Town, I never knew it how big it was! We received many more blessings, but let me finish with one last one.

While shopping around, we walked into a store. There was a TV there. We got to see the last two outs of the World Series that we didn't even know was on.

Now that's a blessing! - Randy Akagi

(Founder's Gravesite)



3/2002 Newsletter Excerpt – Thoughts on Faith by Ben Vose

Early in February, I got the “Konko Spirit Newsletter” in the mail from the Portland Konko Church. As I read through it I felt both happiness and sadness. The happiness was the pleasure of reading about all of the people in the church and the activities which had taken place the month before. The melancholy I felt was the realization of how much less frequently I have been up to visit at the church since the Study Group has not been having its monthly meetings. As it happened, the newsletter arrived on my birthday.

As I read through it I thought about my feelings and realized that here was a chance to practice what I’ve learned from studying ‘The Voice of the Universe.’ I could turn both the happy and sad feelings into blessings by emailing Rev. Lisa to let her know how much I had enjoyed the newsletter.

Much to my surprise, she emailed back a few days later. She thanked me for my comments and asked if I would be willing to send an article of “Thoughts on Faith” for one of the next newsletters. Well, I felt very honored, but I thought, “What can I share?” I have learned so much so fast about the Konko Faith, and there is so much of it that is very difficult to try to capture in words I wondered, “What on earth could I possibly say?”...Then this afternoon, Sunday, February 24, 2002, I was riding home to Cannon Beach from a singing rehearsal in Nehalem, 12 miles south. It’s been raining a lot since November, and I haven’t had many good days to ride my cycle, but today the weather was wonderful. As I round the summit of Hwy. 101 it looks down 300+ feet onto the Pacific Ocean I thought, “What a blessing for an old geezer like me to be bustin’ along at 55 m/h, with this incredible view and the beauty of the wonderful music I’d just been practicing, replaying in my head!”

“That’s it!” I thought, “I’ll write about the blessing of old age!”

Since there was very little traffic on the highway, I started composing the article as I drove along. Soon it occurred to me that for a lot of people in our country, aging is any thing but a blessing.

It suddenly dawned on me as I glided around the bends, “That’s what the *Tenchi Kakitsuke* (Divine Reminder) is all about.” “The divine favor depends upon one’s own heart.”

So, that’s what I’ve decided to write about. One of the most important things I’ve learned since being introduced to the Konko Faith eight years ago is that the secret to a happy old age is to learn to accept everything that happens in our lives as a blessing...one day at a time.

In fact, you don't have to wait until you're old to start transforming challenges into opportunities. Be thankful for problems as well as being grateful for the pleasant things that are easy to be thankful for. And the sooner you start, the more happy days you will have collected by the time you're old.

Now that I've explained how I decided what to write about faith, the "word counter" at the bottom of my word processor screen shows that I've typed over 600 words...and I guess I've already told what it was that I wanted to say about faith, so this could be the end.

Except perhaps, to share a poem I wrote after one of the study groups a few years back when we were studying the section of "The Voice of the Universe" on faith.

After listening to Rev. Nobuharu Uzunoe explain the meanings of the Japanese words in the teachings about faith, and also hearing people in the group tell of their faith practice, it occurred to me that the extent of one's thankfulness is an accurate guide to the depth of one's faith.

"Faith"

Believing in that which cannot be proved,
Nor be measured with anything
other than by depth of gratitude.

Ben Vose, 1998



5/2002 Newsletter - Thoughts on Faith by Mitsunori Takeuchi

(Konko Propagation Hall of Chicago)

Thank you all very much. Last year, there were so many changes throughout the world. These changes were brought on the day of September 11th, just 4 days after my 17th birthday. As you may already know that day was the day that the terrorist groups hijacked 4 American planes. At that time I was in school, talking to my friend. I had no idea that the event occurred until my friends informed me and I had checked it myself on the news.



I found out later that the two planes crashed into the world trade center, one had landed on the pentagon, and the other one had crashed on the field near Pittsburgh. As I watched through the image on the television, I thought it was something out of the movies. It was hard for me to grasp what had occurred. How could this happen in a land where everyone has equality and freedom?

Although I wasn't personally affected by the event, for I didn't know anyone that had died because of that event, it still was hard for me to understand. I was shocked because this occurred in the country where I lived in, in the country where my dad came to teach the Konko faith. His response to the event is that "we should more than ever spread the teaching of Konkosama and bring peace and happiness throughout the world.

The power that had been exemplified by the US's wealth has been the cause of this terrible attack. The power that the US has, made the US the target of the attack. Because people fight over the power and the control, these events occurred. Therefore the US should not retaliate to the attack by "fighting back with power." I agree completely. As I watched the people in Middle East celebrating the attack on the United States, I was terribly appalled and saddened. How can these people celebrate these awful events? I felt bad for them because all they know is the hate against the United States, because all they know is violence in the world, and because they do not understand how important it is to achieve global peace.

I am not pleased with how the United States reacted to the attack. US have declared war against terrorism and had started to attack the countries harboring terrorist groups. Afghanistan has already been affected and the government of Afghanistan, the Taliban, had been overthrown. I know that we are all afraid of terrorism, and that what the terrorists are doing is wrong, but I don't think we can achieve global peace by trying to eliminate known terrorists. Even if the US has been able to eliminate known terrorists, such as Bin Ladin, that will not eliminate terrorism because terrorism comes from the hatefulness that one person has against one country. We cannot eliminate the hatefulness by bringing more violence into a country. We are all human,

and all humans have the power to hate. The only way to erase the hatefulness of the heart is to achieve the peaceful and joyful heart, which our Founder has been talking about.

The event of September 11th has been tragic, and from this event, my mind has been set up even more to help spread the world peace by spreading the Konko faith throughout the world. I don't know what I can do to eliminate terrorism, because I don't have so much hatefulness in my heart, and I am not living in undeveloped countries. All I know is that in my power, I can believe in Konko Sama and try to spread the teachings of our Founder. Although I am unable to determine the future, and am not sure if anything I do will help out the world, I am thankful that Kami Sama has been watching over and helping me to realize what is important in life. I hope that he will watch over me throughout my life, and I will not forget about my religion.

I am still unable to achieve a peaceful and joyful heart and I sometimes forget about it, but still I know that Kami Sama will always be watching over me and I am thankful for that. Thank you all for supporting me till this day and thank you all for supporting me until my life is over. I hope that I will be able to understand what the peaceful and joyful heart is and be able to achieve it so that I can spread the Konko faith throughout the world.

8/2002 Sermon – Instead of worrying practice faith by Rev. Andrew Uzunoe

This is much harder to do than it seems—to really put all of your faith in Kami, and pray wholeheartedly. I spent the past two years learning and relearning this message.

In the year 2000, I came back from Japan and began to help my father, who was ill, with his business. I have been a manager before, but had not worked in the accounting office. I wanted to help my family and gain experience. Rev. Nobuharu Uzunoe always taught that experience makes people wise, not books or just knowing teachings, so I was excited for the new experience.



Though it has been very difficult from the beginning, I am now very grateful. I have received so many different experiences ranging from money management cash accounting, being taken to court, dealing with litigations, collection agencies, government, vendors, negotiations, etc. With each of these events, I have been able to take with me the lessons learned.

The first year, I watched in frustration learning what *not* to do from the present General Manager. He wasted money and resources, lied to everyone, and did not have any sincerity. So I had to pray that the company would survive until I had enough training to take over.

Finally, I received the blessings that I had been praying for—to run the company. First and foremost, I found out that we were massively in debt, owing thousands of dollars to banks, private investors, to vendors, insurance companies, government agency and back taxes. Many of these bills had not been paid in four months. Even our rent was two months overdue, putting us in violation of our lease. There was a good chance we wouldn't even make it to the end of the month, for summer is the off season for our seasonal business. With no money coming in I was not sure how we were going to make it. I was *very* upset and stressed. I'd invested one year in learning and training, and now it was going to fail right from start with my opportunity. I felt cheated—the business was dead even before I ever got chance.

This is when I went and talked at mediation in the church. Rev. Nobuharu Uzunoe (Sensei) taught me that I was not looking at it correctly; that I was backward. He told me that first of all, to remember my heart is at the church. The business was only for experience—a tool to learn from. “Lifetime is a training period of faith.” He said that even if I ended up going bankrupt, it was a great opportunity to learn about that walk of life. Many people who come to the church for help come because they are in trouble. Many people have money problems, so pay attention and learn all you can about bankruptcy. This way, when those people come to you for help in the future, you can help them because you have been there and had that experience.

However, he also taught that if I wanted to avoid bankruptcy, it depended on my prayer and practice of faith. Now the responsibility was on me. In fact, he told me he would pray for the business to fail so that my prayer had to be stronger than all the problems *and* his prayer combined!!! Great.... Like life wasn't hard enough already. But I really learned that if I was going to grow in faith, I had to take this seriously and pray wholeheartedly. “Lastly,” he asked, “Are you open today? I thought, “Well, yes.” This is when he told me then I should be thankful to Kami, for I have one more day to learn and gain valuable experience. Who knows what tomorrow brings. Be thankful for today, and practice faith. With this blessing of today, you can work on all your problems. From Sensei's Mediation, I gained a whole new outlook on work, “As long as we are open today, things could still be worked out.” But my learning/training was only beginning.

Our food company would not deliver—they hadn't been paid in 4 months. I had to meet with a representative negotiate a deal. Through Kami's blessings they still wanted to do business with us, and were very flexible in helping us. Then, I found out that the old general manager (GM) had not paid taxes or payroll taxes in a year! And they (IRS) were threatening to close our

doors. The GM had not paid the county taxes either, and *they* were going to freeze our accounts. What a start! But remembering Sensei's teachings, I prayed wholeheartedly to Kami, to ask for help. I thanked Kami at the end of everyday that the sheriff had yet to show up with chains for our front doors—we were still open. Taking the argument that we were under new management, with each vendor we were able to negotiate a payment plan. The IRS even took away most of the penalties! I was amazed. But Sensei said, if you practice faith wholeheartedly trust in Kami-sama for all things, and be grateful for what you receive, he promised the blessings are endless and MIRACULOUS!!!

What I noticed however, was that new problems suddenly appeared every month. New vendors appeared demanding old debts from bills that were never entered into our accounts payable system. There were also current vendors who demanded their money immediately, today without the option of paying them off on a plan. New problems kept appearing, but they never came all at once. So although it was stressful, I was able to take care of them little by little. There was a teaching I ran across,

Pray to have major misfortunes turned into minor ones. Also pray to have the minor misfortunes cleared away. Try and slowly pour a tub of water from on top of the roof. This is like a minor misfortune. Pouring it all at once is like a major misfortune. Practice faith, and like the water being poured out slowly, have major misfortunes turned into minor ones. Then your irreverences will be cleared away and you'll be blessed with prosperity. (Voice of the Universe #249)

With Kami's help, the problems seemed to wait in line until the previous one had been resolved.

Then the other day, my CPA called, and congratulated me. I asked what that meant, for he was doing our corporate taxes. He told me that we made lots of money last year! WOW!!!! We *made* money??? I was shocked. All we had were problems, one after another, always behind on *all* our bills, and we *still* made money. Well, then the bad news hit, we owed taxes for that money—LOTS of taxes. Though I had made money, the bills I was paying were over a year old, and so did not count against this year's taxes. And after I cut cost dramatically, this year's bills were lower than the cash intake. Too bad I never got to see any of that money we made—it went straight to the people I owed, yet the government now wanted thousands in taxes!

Once again I was crushed, taxed out of existence by our caring government. But when I sought Mediation from Michie Sensei, she reprimanded me. "You come here today very stressed because of new problem. One, pray to Kami

and be thankful you are still able to open today. Two, you complain about taxes. Taxes mean success!! With blessings from Kami from your requests, the business turned from failing, imminent bankruptcy to great success! That is an INCREDIBLE BLESSING! Yet all you say are complaints, 'What am I going to do about taxes?' Where is your thankful heart!?"

I had forgotten once again, of my point of being at work. Training and experience. I had not been thankful for each new day that we were open. After almost two years, I had not been thankful for all our success. Every problem in the past seemed like a mountain 30,000 feet tall, impossible to climb over, yet we are still open. And though we are still paying back bills, none of the vendors have shut us down. In every case Kami has provided a solution for us so that we can be here today to take on all and any problem. Yet even after all the blessings, I found that I still was not practicing wholeheartedly, or with 100% trust in Kami. I have so much room still to grow, and gain in faith. Yet, we still were able to survive. Think of the possibilities still out there with more faith, and more goyo [church duties]!

Today, we are still in financial danger, yet we are still open after two years. I still have many more opportunities of learning experiences to go, and have yet to experience bankruptcy. I am here to tell you that practicing faith works! I missed this message many times in the last few years, became very stressed about imminent failure, but in the end Kami has NEVER failed me!!!

All this time I have worried and paced, for no reason. If I had trusted in Kami 100% and practiced faith wholeheartedly from the beginning, I would have saved myself a lot of grief. But I am grateful to have learned this lesson, and to be able to share my experiences with you today in hopes of helping all of you with the stress and worry of life. Prayer does work. Kami does listen. And if we believe, trust, and pray, our future is endlessly bright with possibilities!

Today we celebrate the Tenchi Kane No Kami Grand Ceremony. This is our opportunity to thank Kami for a whole year's worth of blessings and divine arrangements—whether in business or in life for the 365 days Kami has watched over us and taken care of our needs. We are alive and here today, able to take on all the challenges of life, and gain blessings and experience.

This is the greatest blessing of all, life. And as long as we have life today, we have a chance to make things better. Please join me in realizing all the blessings we have received and thanking Kami with a sincere and grateful heart. Thank you.

11/2002 Newsletter Mini Sermon - Practice Faith with a Grateful Heart, and Kami Will Give Us More Blessings Than We Can Carry by Rev. Michie

I was only looking for a cheap ticket to help my husband with the Gardena Grand Service, but with Kami's guidance, I ended up with armful of blessings.

How? First, on my way to Gardena, I saw a mother with four small children at the airport. I thought, "Oh No! I hope they don't sit near me," but they did. But, I was completely wrong about them. They were well behaved children and the mother was wonderful. They didn't make any noise at all. I apologized to Kami for my poor heart. I was able to have a humble heart through all of the goyo I did at Gardena Church.

Then, coming home, I couldn't believe my eyes. In LAX, again a mother with four children, exactly the same as before, 3 boys and a girl. I noticed the people around them. Many people looked down at the family, anticipating irritation like I did before. But this time, instead of thinking only about my comfort, I was right away able to pray for the hard working mom.

In the plane, I could not tell where that family was at all. But, as I was sandwiched by a crying baby and little boy, I began to think that if they were my grandchildren I had to pray for them instead of complaining. So my heart changed from being irritated, to concern and prayer throughout the rest of the trip. Kami was showing me step by step how to keep a grateful heart. Thank you Kami sama!

12/2002 Newsletter - The Heart of Kami in Children by Rev. Michie Uzunoe

One day when I was taking my four year old grandson out, after we got in the car Daniel asked, "Where is Kami-sama Bachan?" [Referring to the Goshinmai Sacred Paper with Konko symbol on it.] I thought, "Oh, no!" I didn't realize until then that I never had an oharai (purification rite) for our own van. This is like a doctor who doesn't check his own health.

Why did he ask? When Daniel's family bought their new van, his father gave him money to put in an envelope, write his name himself, and offer it in thanks to Kami, too. At this time, he had asked, "Why do you do that?" I'd answered, "Because we need Kami's protection for places and times we cannot see." I was amazed he remembered this. Even a 4-year-old boy has Kami in his heart, thanks to his father.

We adults think we know more, but on this day, I learned from a little one. As our Founder said, *"...Those who practice faith should listen well, even to children's lullabies, as you might hear Kami's teachings."*

So please listen carefully—Kami's voice is all around you.

**2/2004 Newsletter Sermon - Overconfidence can be dangerous by
Rev. Amy Uzunoe-Chin**

Good Morning! I hope everyone was able to stay safe and warm this week. Being all stuck inside my house these past four days or so, I have been watching a lot of news coverage of the winter storm.



What interested me were those stories of people who thought they knew how to drive well in this snowy and icy condition, especially those people with 4x4s, all wheel drive, or chains becoming overconfident of either the performance of their vehicle and/or their skill in driving. These were the many people getting into accidents and/or causing the accidents.

On Friday, the snow finally started to melt, which reasoned many people to venture out to drive to work, to go shopping, or just to drive to get out of the house. A sheriff on the news was talking about the rise in accidents and increase in the seriousness of the injuries because of the increase in speed, traffic, and the increase in the confidence of the drivers on the road.

Having overconfidence not only in driving, but everything we do in our lives may also lead to consequences. Even those who practice faith may become overconfident. There is a teaching by Konko Daijin which reads,

Even a monkey sometimes falls from a tree, and great scholars make mistakes. If you think climbing a tree is dangerous, you will be very cautious when doing so and will not get hurt. However, when you become a little better at climbing, you may become careless and get seriously hurt or die.

Conceit can lead to a serious disaster.

You should practice faith carefully even when you are healthy.

Voice of the Universe #268 / Gorikai III Jinkyu Kyogoroku 184

I have a personal experience of my own of how overconfidence leads to nothing but problems! It has been almost a year now since Willy and I decided to sell our house in Vancouver. I remember we were very happy and excited when we were given an offer within two days of putting our house on the market. We were telling everybody how we were able to sell our house in such a short amount of time. We were also very confident that everything would sell to our financial expectation and how we were sure we would have a done deal in a week.

Well, as some of you may already know, when the inspector came to examine our house, he found a major problem. We had a lot of water in our crawl space, which meant more time was needed to fix the problem and more money needed to be spent to hire a contractor and fix the problem. We went through three different contractors, and we had to have the inspector come out two different times before we finally were able to repair the crawl space. This took a total of a little over two weeks. In addition, when it came to buying our current house, we had problems with our appraisals. We went through two different banks before we were approved to the price the Seller was asking for. This also took more time.

I realized through this experience that

- 1.) We were much overconfident
- 2.) We were doing things on our own “human” power.

It was like saying, “Oh Thank you Kami for helping us find a seller, but now that we have a buyer, we don’t need anymore of your help, we have a buyer so everything else should go as planned, right?” Boy, was I wrong!

My parents have always taught me that having overconfidence when practicing faith is a dangerous thing. It will lead to misguidance, arrogance, and nothing but problems because we tend to forget to do things with Kami. If we forget the things we are taught by Kami, and forget to understand and appreciate that we are able to do things and have things because of Kami’s divine blessings, we will not be able to receive divine blessings.

Having confidence in the things we do is not a bad thing, it is a good thing. However, what we need to be is careful and not to become overconfident and show arrogance in the things we do. This will lead to problems and danger, which will lead us the wrong way.

Our Founder Konko Daijin showed us the importance of humbleness. He showed us how divine blessings are given by Kami through our humbleness when practicing faith in our daily lives.

Let us not forget Kami’s teachings and let us practice our faith through understanding Konko Daijin’s way of life so that every one of us can receive divine blessings the way our Founder Konko Daijin did.

Thank you.

4/2003 Newsletter Mini Sermon - by Rev. Michie Uzunoe

Just the other day, I received a letter with a considerable offering to the Portland Church from a couple in Japan. Visiting our church about 10 years ago, the couple's hearts moved deeply to the Konko Faith.



Their letter expressed their sincerest thanks to our church for the many miraculous blessings they have received since they returned home from America. Receiving significant blessings again recently, they wanted to show their appreciation to our Portland Church—the place where their faith started. Their thanks is so deep and sincere, that I feel I want to bow down and say “thank you” to them because they received those blessings through their single heartedness.

This is what it means by, “The Divine favor depends upon your own heart,” just as our Founder Konko Daijin said. Thank You to those who are receiving blessings; you make us, Kami, and Konko Daijin happy!

1/2004 Newsletter Mini Sermon - by Rev. Michie Uzunoe

A few days ago, I woke up in the morning having to go to the bathroom. Not wanting to get out of the warm comfortable bed, I jokingly asked Nobuharu Uzunoe Sensei who was visiting for the holidays, “Please go for me!” Then I thought about it. Faith is the same. We receive so many blessings from Kami to take out poisons from our bodies, but you have to get up and go to bathroom yourself to finish job—to finish receiving the blessing Kami gave us, no one else can do it for you. Our Founder once said, *“You should practice faith on your own...”* (GIII Konko Kyoso Gorikai 26).

4/2004 Newsletter Mini Sermon - by Rev. Michie Uzunoe

“Faith is to polish the gem in your heart” (GIII Shinkun 21).

On my way back to the church from my daughter's house, my grandson stopped and while pointing said, “Oh no!” The Mon (Konko crest) had fallen off the building and was lying on the ground.

Looking at the Mon and then up at the entrance roof where it used to hang, I realized I had been thinking that area needs painting, but had not gotten to it. What I didn't realize was just how scratched up and dirty the Mon itself was, it used to have gold film. I polished it back to a shine.

The teaching above is what came to me after this experience. You always need to polish your heart through faith or else even if it is shiny like gold, it will rust and fall off.

3/2004 Mini Sermon – Faith Grows In Rich Soil by Rev. Lisa Uzunoe

While helping Amy Sensei (now 8 months into her pregnancy) plant her corn yesterday, I struggled with trying to dig a shallow trench in the rocky hard ground. The shovel wouldn't even go in one inch before it jolted and hit a rock. After carving out two lines along the house, I was thoroughly exhausted.

Fertilizing the dead soil and placing the corn seeds, we found we needed two more lines dug. Wanting to help but knowing my body wouldn't be able to handle two more lines of jolting, I prayed to Kami before starting again to please help me.

This time, the ground was just as hard in a few places, but softer, darker, and much easier in most. Amy mentioned that those soft spots were probably places she had planted pots the year before.

So grateful, I thanked Kami for the help, and for teaching me that even just one year of caring and fertilizing can make such a big difference. Michie Sensei had recently taught in her sermon about the Founder's teaching that says,

"Above all, you should enrich your faith. Practicing faith in everyday life is important. If you have rich soil, things will grow without [emergency] fertilization, and so it is with faith."

She wanted to develop her faith enough so that it would be like a richly fertilized field where the seeds she planted (efforts from practicing faith and prayers) would grow strong (become blessings), and even those seeds that accidentally dropped on the field would root and sprout.

What does my field look like I wonder? Let us learn how to enrich our faith through studying the Founder's teachings, and begin to turn hard rocky soil into delicious fruits like Michie Sensei has!



4/2004 Newsletter – Blessings Even in Miscarriage by Rev. Lisa Uzunoe

...Going back to what our Founder taught, he said that by *“telling others about the blessings you have received, people will be saved. (VU 368)”*

I can explain and reason to you about how practicing faith is important and what it can do for you. But I feel this time, maybe just laying out the events and facts we experienced with our miscarriage will help more...

On the third week of December, through a home pregnancy test, we found out I was pregnant. [“Okusama”, 5th Konko Sama’s wife, had given us three origami—one for each of our future children, so this would be number two. Was happy because we thought we could announce it as a Christmas present for grandparents.] One week later, I had a dream I was going through labor at the hospital, gave birth, but then was telling Andy that the doctor said baby boy was healthy, except had a brain tumor—not determined yet whether malignant or not. After waking up, sought Mediation with Michie Sensei who told us we really had to pray for our baby this time.

Second week of January, was praying at the ancestral altar for help with names for baby. Somehow, “Saki,” jumped out at me. Didn’t know if it was a real Japanese name, but sounded cute. In my dream the baby was a boy, but now thought maybe it was a girl?

On the third week of January, we had our first doctor appointment for the baby. According to the doctor, I was 11 weeks pregnant, almost at the end of three months already, but he couldn’t find a heartbeat for the baby. Being the only doctor in the office who was licensed to perform ultrasounds, he scheduled one for that evening. Evening came, and ultrasound showed no heartbeat or movement. Baby was only 7 weeks 4 days old—not even bigger than a pea. According to their calculations, heart had stopped beating somewhere 1st or 2nd week of December (even before our pregnancy test).

My doctor said usually the baby is flushed naturally by the body within the first week, if not, then most likely won’t come out on its own. Therefore, need to schedule DNC (suction cleaning). 99.9% sure baby not alive, but before schedule DNC, will wait a week to be 100% sure no heartbeat still and no growth. Not much hope, but there was one case in his whole career, where they waited a week and there was a heartbeat the second time. But also laid out the facts that one out of four pregnancies don’t make it, so very big odds to hope against. Appointment for next Tuesday. Possible complications, hemorrhaging, scarring, infection – all of which could lead to not being able to have children in the future.

Now that was quite a bit to deal with in one day. (I left in tears.) I was also to leave for the Missionary Women’s Society Seminar Friday-Sunday in Gardena, but because of risking an emergency landing on the plane or

elsewhere had I started bleeding, (which we were told could be very painful and had pain medication something as strong as morphine ready for me) we decided it would be best if I stayed home.

Then started the seven days of waiting. Wanting to hope for recovery of the lost life, yet not wanting to push our own desires because of the dream I had. And if was meant to be, then we would rather let the baby go now rather than to have her born and suffer the rest of her life. We also found out through grandma [Rev. Reiko Bingo] that “Saki” could be read in Japanese as “in front of,” “before or beyond” ...as in “beyond this world.”

We wanted to have the baby come out naturally. We wanted to be able to bury her and have the burial site somewhere on the church property. But since the doctor said it was unlikely the baby would come out if it hadn't already, and if we had a DNC the hospital probably had some regulation that wouldn't allow us to take the body home or just bury it wherever we wanted, and since we knew Michie Sensei was sensitive to spirits so weren't sure WHAT she would say to burying a baby in the back yard, the situation didn't look so good; especially because Andy was really worried about my health and also was ready to storm the hospital to take back Saki's body if he had to. Michie Sensei was worried about the DNC as that was the experience that hurt her heart the most with her two miscarriages.

As emotional as everyone was by this point, praying about all of these things, we realized the most important thing was the baby, Saki and her happiness. I'm sure having her father go to jail over her was the last thing she wanted.

So, we did what we've been taught all of these years—changed our wishes into prayers. This allowed us to take a step back, collect ourselves, put our trust back into Kami, and be at peace with whatever outcome.

On 9:00 Monday morning, the day before our doctor appointment, I started bleeding. It wasn't much, but I felt immediately I had to line the toilet with a plastic bag, so I did. We called the doctor's office and although my doctor wasn't in, a lab tech could perform the ultrasound so we changed it to 1:30 that afternoon. Afternoon came and to the lab tech's surprise, the ultrasound showed no baby. They said it must have flushed out already. Went home, and sure enough, in that plastic bag lining, was the embryo. Doctor's office said we could do with it whatever we wanted.

Keeping our appointment for Tuesday evening, we were waiting in the doctor's office when Michie sensei showed up; just returned from the meeting in Gardena. Hearing there were no legal procedures for an embryo, she immediately said we should bury Saki somewhere on the church grounds. What??? We didn't even have to ask. After hours more of waiting, we finally saw our doctor, who after looking at the ultrasounds, said it looked

like everything came out and since nothing was left, there was no need for a DNC. Just watch to make sure the bleeding didn't worsen and will check make sure no infection in two weeks. I never had any pain.

We were able to bury Saki in the bamboo grove behind the church. Our families and distant relatives came from near and far to attend Saki's memorial service. Michie sensei said she's never seen such a gathering and flowers for a baby not even born. And after two weeks came, the doctor said everything was fine, no infection, womb was back to normal, and said we can try again after just two months.



Saki's deer, with animals added for all family mitama children

Recapping the events that happened, we are so very grateful. It made me think of the teaching that says *“Practice faith with diligence, then major misfortunes will become minor ones. These minor ones in turn will be cleared away. This is receiving the divine arrangement of Kami”* (II: Tsugawa Haruo 9-3).

But this is also in every day life, not just big happenings. As Kami-sama also showed me yesterday when Jubei fell off, hit his chin on the toilet seat and cut his mouth. At first look, I thought he might need stitches as it looked as if it was a deep open wound. Taking him directly to in front of our altar and applying sacred rice paper *goshinmai*, (which was difficult because Jubei kept swallowing it), the bleeding stopped. I could see little teeth mark cuts, but not one big open gash like I thought.

Major misfortunes into minor ones, and minor ones into none.

Please practice faith to receive this blessing for yourself and your family as well! Thank you.

[I have always lived “carrying” my two mitama brothers with me, especially as I have always wanted an older brother. My mother has seen him before, but I haven't. But when I was in the seminary and it was my turn to lead the students that day, nervous, I prayed for my Nichan to help me. Leading the procession of students to the main worship hall, upon approaching the glass doors at the bottom, the girl next to me screamed, looking around frantically saying, “Where did he go?” She saw the reflection of a boy standing next to me with the white kimono top (only leads wear white, all others black). But when she turned around to look, he wasn't there—no one in white was (not even my co-lead who was supposed to be). Since then, and another similar incident at an FTI, I know our mitama are with us. We are grateful our boys care for and keep their sister in their hearts in the same way.]

2004—Thoughts on Faith by Karen Sunada

Last week I was asked to do an article in the newsletter. I wondered what I would say but as I sat down at the table my thoughts just came together.

So much has happened to our family over the past few years. We have shared triumphs and trials, gains and losses, happiness and heartaches. The passing of my father (Jerry Inouye) made me appreciate my life fully. He told me to have faith in Kami and you will receive divine blessings and have a meaningful and fulfilling life.



What is a fulfilling life I asked myself?

It is the daily experience of wholeness and balance, being fully alive in body, mind and spirit. Being able to take care of your physical, emotional, social and spiritual health. Appreciating the beauty of nature, having peace of mind and contentment as well as a sense of humor and a sense of purpose.

Through Ikigami Konko Daijin you can achieve this. My father said, "he will be watching over us" and I believe he is looking down upon us and smiling.

A Relative in Heaven by Rev. Michie Uzunoe

Shortly after becoming Head Minister, one morning when Michie Sensei opened the front doors to the church to pray, she saw a HUGE orange Harvest moon over Mt. Tabor (Honbu's direction). It suddenly "dropped out of the sky." Startled, on instinct, she threw her arms out to catch it.

Recalling it was foolish to think you could catch the moon, she said, "But I did and I felt it's weight on my arms, and a voice saying, 'Ten ni ikke wo moke' [I will give you a relative in heaven]. This was one of the teachings I never understood before and wondered about. I thought, 'Oh, this is what it meant' - to become one with nature, to become family with nature. Through this experience, I understood it not with my head, but physically with my body."

And since then, she received blessings of wonderful weather anytime a church event happened. In praying for clear weather at least during the sensei processions so their garments wouldn't get wet, visiting ministers and believers even commented about how nice the weather always was during the Grand Ceremonies in Portland (when it should have been raining). It reminded her of the revelation given to our Founder, Konko Daijin:

Kami-Sama told me, "Everyone says that since they don't have relatives in Heaven, they can't tell if it will rain or shine. I will give you a relative in Heaven." I was thankful for this good fortune. (Oboegaki 5-13)

Michie Sensei was humbled that someone like her could receive such a treasure from Kami Sama.

6/2004 Newsletter - Sermon (excerpt) by Hiroko Takeuchi

(Konko Propagation Hall of Chicago)

Hi, my name is Hiroko, and I was asked by Michie sensei to do the speech in today's Portland Church Spring Grand Ceremony... I would like to say thank you to everyone for having me as a speaker today, and also for praying for us, and praying for the Chicago Propagation Hall all the time. I would like to give my appreciation especially to Uzunoe oya-sensei and to Michie sensei for having me



here today, and praying for me, my family, and most of all, for the Chicago propagation hall all the time. I could never thank them enough with my words.

Today, I was asked to speak with the topic of "Why I am standing here today", so I am going to start off with my history. I was born in one of the Konko Church in Japan, and I grew up in that church until I was 12. When I was 12, through Rev Uzunoe's support, my dad's long time wish became true, and our family came to America. I met almost everybody in here for the first time, and through everyone's support, and help of kamisama, our family was able to stay here for almost 3 years. After the 3 years of stay in Portland, our family moved to Chicago to establish the Konko Propagation Hall.

After we moved to Chicago, I felt so lonely. I started going to new school in September, but I had hard time trying to get used to it. I had to make new friends all over again, and that was the hardest thing for me at that time. I complained to kamisama in my heart all the time, and I started doubting kamisama a lot. Even though I grew up in a Konko church, and my life was always with the Konko faith, I started losing connection with kamisama as I moved to Chicago.

Nobody else other than our family was a Konko believer in Chicago, and I think that was a big issue for me at that time. I started feeling embarrassed about telling people about my faith, and therefore, I was making walls between people and myself. I didn't want people to know about myself, I didn't want people to know that my parents were ministers of the Konko religion. Also, another reason I started doubting kamisama is because as you know, kamisama is invisible. We can't see or hear kamisama. And I always had thought that if kamisama exists, kamisama would give each and everyone the equal amount of blessings, and therefore, everyone will have equal life. But because I always had felt I was blessed unfairly, I started complaining to kamisama about everything in my life, and I started doubting kamisama's

existence. I didn't know the meaning of real blessings that our founder taught us in his teachings at that time. Therefore, I always complained, and never appreciated kamisama for anything at that time.

I started walking my own life without kamisama. I started dating a Korean boy, and started living my life with selfishness. As I started working, I started thinking that because I worked hard by myself, I could use the money that I earned for whatever I wanted. As I started getting good grades in School, I started thinking that I had a power to do anything all by myself. I had thought, since I studied hard and worked hard, I had the right to eat anything I wanted, and used the money to buy anything I wanted. I became so selfish. I had never thought that the fact that I was living, and had a chance to go to school, and the fact that I was able to get a job, and had some income to spend were also blessings from kamisama at that time. When I think about it now, the food that we are given to eat everyday, the water that we have, the shelter that we live in, the clothes that we wear everyday are also big blessings from kamisama, but I never sincerely felt that way at that time. Somewhere in my heart, I always complained to kamisama about the unfairness. I always had doubts, and I never thought kamisama could read my mind.

However at the same time, for some reason, I always had felt that I would someday become a Konko minister as well through kamisama's arrangement. But I was never sure about my faith, so I didn't really want to see myself becoming a Konko minister, and I was so scared and confused about my future.

I passed 2nd year of college with those feelings in my mind, and also some doubts in kamisama, and in the summer of 2002, which was right before my 3rd year of college, I started having so many problems in my life. My health broke down, and I started having allergies all over my arms. My face also started breaking out a lot. That time, I couldn't see why, all te sudden, I started having so many problems in my life.

As I grew up in Japan, I was taught in the church to accept everything, good or bad, which comes to our life as a gift from kamisama, "because everything that happens in our daily life is a blessing from kiamisama". But I never knew why bad happenings would be, or how they could be consider as blessings. So, when all those problems came up in my life, I didn't know what to do. I knew kamisama might be sending me some message through that, but I didn't know what kamisama was saying. I started facing kamisama, and I started praying to kamisama for the answer.

However, things became worse even after that. Summer break ended, and I went back to college as a junior. I had bought all the books for my classes, and I was all ready for the first day of my class, but for some reason, I couldn't concentrate on anything anymore. I tried to study, tried to read books, and tried to concentrate on lectures, but nothing went into my head. So I started worrying about everything. I also started losing confidence in my success. I went to the gokkekai [Mediation Seat], and told my dad about it, and asked for guidance. But still, I couldn't find the right answer. I thought, and thought about so many things. I asked myself, whether I was walking toward the right direction. I didn't know if trying to get a degree in Finance with my weak faith in kamisama was the right path for my future. I also thought, if I will end up becoming a minister, I don't need to get degree in Finance.

I was confusing myself more and more as I thought about all those things. I needed a break, and find the answer. And suddenly, I started thinking about the church that I grew up until I was 12 and thought, I might be able to find the answer there. I knew that my dad was also going back to that church to attend the 35th anniversary in October, so I asked him to take me back there with him.

Before I went back to that church, I told my parents that I might not come back to Chicago anymore. I was ready to lose my green card. I just wanted to find out kamisama's wish on me, so I threw everything to go back to that church, because I really felt, that church would have the answer.

In October of 2002, I went back to the church that I grew up in. I had trained in that church until September of 2003. Tasks that I had to do in that church wasn't that hard, but I had a little hard time with some other things. I still had so many problems in my health, and also, I had hard time in my sleeps. I was still worrying about so many things, and doubting kamisama. But in my training days, although I wouldn't say I had mastered it, I was practicing to accept everything that come up in my life with joy, and as blessings from kamisama, as that church had been teaching ever since I was young. And through trying to practice that teaching, I started seeing kamisama's workings. I realized how great it was to accept everything that come up in my life, even those unwanted happenings. I started feeling the rhythm in my life with workings of kamisama, and I started to learn to communicate with kamisama. Although I can't see or hear kamisama, I feel protected by kamisama everyday, and I can feel that kamisama is watching over me every single moment now. I now communicate with kamisama through daily happenings in my life, and I can now believe kamisama's existence.

Also, as I started to see kamisama's workings, and blessings, and as I started trusting in kamisama without any doubts, I started to see how powerless I am without kamisama's help. Also, I started to see how bad I was to kamisama. I started to see how much I was disrespectful and ignorant to kamisama. Then I looked more at myself, and saw how dirty my heart was. I saw my selfishness, stubbornness, rudeness, unkindness, and many other bad qualities in myself. I realized how much I was disrespectful toward others, and how much worries I had caused to so many people, especially to Uzunoe oyasennsei and Michie sensei. I felt how sad kamisama must have been as he raised me. I wanted to change. I wanted to clean out dirty parts of myself. I realized that it was the time for me to get trusted by kamisama since I could now trust in kamisama without any doubt.

In order to get kamisama's trust, I realized that I had to change, and I wanted to change. I had to reform my heart, and try to get kamisama's heart within my heart. I believe kamisama's heart consists of three most important qualities. They are giving, accepting, and sincerity toward others. I wanted to polish those qualities and have a kamisama's heart for myself. Well, of course, that would be my lifetime faith training, but as I thought about all those things, I realized I had to apologize kamisama for my past behavior first. I had to apologize kamisama for doubting, complaining, and being disrespectful. I also had to apologize for my misunderstandings. For all these years, while kamisama had been protecting me, and blessed me with many things, I had been complaining to him. Although I am a powerless child without kamisama's help, and I don't have any talent or even any knowledge, I didn't realize that until I lost everything and went back to Japan.

As I realized myself, and as I started apologizing kamisama for everything, I also started thanking kamisama for keeping me alive till today with so many blessings around me. I then wanted to show my appreciation to this kamisama. I then started wanting to serve kamisama for the rest of my life. I wanted to be used by kamisama in helping to save other people's heart. Around the time I realized myself, and started feeling this way, it was already the time for me to decide whether I should stay in Japan, and lose my green card, or go back to America and save my green card. I wanted to know what was kamisama's wish, so I asked kamisama for the guidance. I asked kamisama to show me the answer through some happening, and sure enough, kamisama gave me so many happenings to show me that kamisama's wish for me was in America. I realized that kamisama had been waiting for me to wake up until now. I felt I really had to go back to America, and so I did in September of 2003.

After I came back to Chicago, I thought, my duty was to help out my parents in spreading the Konko faith in Chicago, so I started concentrating on appearance of the propagation hall, and I started thinking so much way to spread this faith in Chicago. I had never thought about going back to school or anything at that time. I just wanted to help out my parents, and I thought that was also what kamisama wanted me to do.

But through so many happenings, I realized that was not what kamisama wanted me to do, and I realized that no matter how hard I tried right now, I could never be a good help of kamisama, or even of my parents in saving others yet. I realized, with my still small heart, I would just cause so many problems, and I could only bother kamisama. And at the same time I had realized that, so many happenings lead me to put school in my mind.

I started wanting to go back to school again and start over again. I realized if I wanted to be used by kamisama in America, I had to learn more English, and I had to get a college diploma. I also realized that I had to see outside of home, and learn about many other people, other culture, and other religion. I realized I didn't know anything about America yet. I then decided to reapply to school, and I waited for the answer. I believed that if kamisama wishes me to go back to school, kamisama would surely give me another chance to go back to school again. However, the first letter I had received from school was that they couldn't accept my application. Although it was some computer mistake that school had made, and they ended up looking over at my application again. Through this happening, I, somewhat, hesitated about going back to school. That happening was as if kamisama was testing my passion toward school. So, I asked myself again if I really wanted to go back. I know it would be hard for me to start all over again after 2 years of gap, so of course I had so many worries too. But I had a goal this time, and this time, the purpose of me going to school, was different from that of last time I was going to school. I knew what I wanted to achieve through going back to school if I was given a chance again. As soon as I made sure my feelings, I got an acceptance letter from school.

As I looked back about my past, I realized how much I made other people worry about me, and how much I was disrespectful toward others, and toward kamisama. I could never apologize enough for my past behaviors, and I could never appreciate enough for the blessings I had received up to now, and also the blessings I am receiving right at this moment to kamisama with my words. Therefore, I would like to give back my life to kamisama, and I want to become of a good use to kamisama. I want to serve kamisama for the rest of my life, and I want to be able to let many other people that still doubt kamisama's workings, understand, and see kamisama's great blessings.

I had learned so much about Konko faith, including about our founder's life, and our founder's teachings during my training period in Japan. I also had learned the rhythm of the universe through trying to follow our founder's teachings. I also had realized my misunderstandings and bad behaviors of the past, and also, the smallness and dirtiness of my heart, and powerlessness of myself without kamisama. Although I had to quit college once, and went back to Japan, and made so many people worry in order for me to wake up and realize kamisama's wish, I don't regret about going back to Japan. The time in Japan was the most valuable time in my whole life. I learned so many important and valuable things, which I would need in walking toward the rest of my life.

Thank you so much for being patient with me, and praying for me. I would like to use this place to apologize everyone also, especially to Uzunoe oyasensei and Michie sensei, for my past behavior, and I would also like to appreciate them and everyone for supporting, and praying for me, for our family, and for the Chicago Propagation Hall. I really would like to pay back to everyone and most of all, to kamisama, in the future, for so many things that I have owed kamisama in the past, through serving him. Yes, I would go back to school again in September, and try my best again. Yes, I'm hoping to become a minister in the future. But also as I walk toward my future, I should polish my heart more and more, and get trusted by kamisama like our founder, and become of a good use to kamisama.

I still have some desires for my own, but I am practicing to throw my own selfish desires, and hope for the saving of others. I am practicing to feel the rhythm of the universe everyday through trying to accept everything that comes up in my life as kamisama's workings. I am, now, practicing to be able to say this to kamisama from the bottom of my heart; "To Ikigami Konko Daijinn, from now on, I will stop asking kamisama for this or that favor. I think it is certain that kamisama has expectation even of someone like me. In order to achieve the expectations kamisama has for me, I will never complain or feel dissatisfied, no matter what the consequences are. I'll accept whatever happens. Therefore, from now on, please pray for the will of Kamisama to be fulfilled." I wish that someday, I could be able to say this from the bottom of my heart, and I wish that I could get trust from kamisama, and used by kamisama to serve in America.

Thank you so much for being patient and listening to my speech today. And again, thank you so much for everything that you had done for my family and me.

**7/2004 Newsletter – One More Lesson from Head Minister’s Seminar Trip
by Rev. Michie Uzunoe**

***“The ways of Kami are mysterious and wondrous
beyond our understanding”*** (Adoration Prayer).

Yes, I have experienced this teaching so many times, but both of us (Nobuharu Uzunoe Sensei and I) experienced Kami’s ultra divine arrangements this time.



I had purchased plane and Japan Rail pass tickets, but because I miscounted the days for the one week rail pass, we had to return to the Narita Airport a day before we were to leave Japan. However, this was not a mistake, but was Kami’s divine arrangement I noticed later.

After the four days seminar and meetings at the H.Q. in Konko town, our visit to Nagasaki, and return to Konko for one night, the big typhoon was already hitting this area. Instead of leaving after breakfast as we planned, we left on the earliest train after visiting Konko Sama.

The downpour of rain just started on our way to the station and when we were in the Shinkansen (bullet train) I saw the typhoon wind and rain chasing us with a fury from the window.

After we arrived to the airport Hotel, on TV we saw the Shinkansen had closed two hours after we had passed it. Some people were stuck and had to stay over night in the train or the station. Many flights were canceled too.

But, because of my initial miscalculation taking us home one day later than planned, our flight was fine to leave the next day. I thanked Kami while watching all the trees thrashing so hard in the wind and rain.

We received many other arrangements for every single movement we made.

We so easily judge happenings instantly as good or bad, just because things were or were not in favor for us.

But, if you are practicing faith or once you pray to Kami, you have to believe good or bad, Kami surely guide you to the best way for you.

7/2004 Newsletter – Faith Story by Erin Akagi

I'm sure that most people think they are asking me the easiest question in the world when they ask, "So what was Japan like?" In reality, it's a very difficult question, and I find myself being very vague in my answers, and always wishing that I could tell everyone about *all* of my experiences. Unfortunately, unless you have a few hours or time to read pages and pages, I'll just explain the main points that I find myself using in my answer to "So... what was Japan like?"



When I try to think back on everything that happened in Japan, a certain chain of events follows. First of all, I think about all the differences between Japanese culture and American culture, which is something that I couldn't help but do often while I was in Japan. It's so natural to compare what you're used to with what is different from what you're used to. This doesn't have to be a "bad" thing, necessarily. The key to embracing this reaction is to learn from it. I accepted that Americans might do something that Japanese people would do differently, and I considered myself lucky because I got to see two different ways to do things, and I had the power to decide for myself which way I liked better. It doesn't mean that one way was right and the other wrong—just different. This also let me appreciate things from home that I used to take for granted, and at the same time, learn to do things in a new way, with a different view point. This was a major lesson I learned during my nine months in Tokyo, which turned out to be fabulous. When it was time to come home, I was very excited to see all the people, places, and special American things that I missed. But at the same time, when I look back on Japan, I have nothing but wonderful memories. The transition of moving back home was smooth, because I learned that both cultures have amazing aspects to them.

Naturally when I think about how I was able to learn from my experiences, how I am able to love more than just one culture, and how happy I am with both my time in Japan and coming home to the U.S., I feel appreciation. My faith has deepened significantly more now that I know a little bit more about the world. I am so thankful for that, and owe my entire trip to my family and to Kami Sama. My parents were so supportive of me, always encouraging me to make the best of my time and do whatever this once-in-a-lifetime experience had to offer. I prayed whole-heartedly before, during, and after being in Japan. All of my prayers were answered, and then some even. Now my prayer and hope is that everyone can have that chance that I did to study abroad and learn more about other cultures, and at the same time, learn about theirs.

8/2004 Newsletter Sermon - Kami's Protection & Guidance

by Rev. Amy Uzunoe-Chin

Thinking of the last 6 months, many things have happened, some good and some bad. As Michie Sensei just prayed for us in the main prayer; we have received many divine blessings for the first half of 2004. Knowing Kami is always looking after us I should be calm, no matter what may occur, just like our Founder, Ikigami Konko Daijin. However, I seem to panic and worry first, before I start to realize Kami's continued protection and guidance for me. Just recently, I was shown by Kami, again, my lack of practicing faith.



This week I have been working on the Spring Faith Training Institute student packets, which were due to be mailed out on July 1st. On the 1st, I had everything completed, folders, envelopes bought, folders color coded, envelopes labeled with the addresses, schedules, information and maps printed and ready to be copied at Kinkos. The only thing left for me to do was to print out the class outlines which I was waiting, from the day before, from an instructor to send to me by email. I waited and waited for the email to come, 2 o'clock passed, and finally around 4 o'clock I received the email. I remember I was thinking to myself "finally I can complete my project" as I downloaded the file into my hard drive. It was getting to be around dinner time so I decided to prepare dinner first and print out the outlines later.

Well, around 6:20pm, when my mother-in-law and I were just finishing eating dinner, the power went out! Assuming that it would come back up again within minutes, I did not worry. However, I found out that they estimated the power would not be back until midnight! This is when I started to panic and scrambled to see who still had power and internet access. Church was out, even Kinkos was out! Even if I was able to get access to the internet I needed to find a place where I could make mass copies.

It was around 7:40 pm, I was sitting on my bed when Willy came out of the shower and uttered, "don't worry, it will come back soon, pray to Kami Sama". What? Pray to Kami sama? I don't mean to make my husband look bad, but my husband usually never says things like this. I don't know, maybe Kami Sama possessed him. 😊 However, he was right.

Everything has been going so smoothly. Why now? I asked myself, "What did I do wrong?" I realized that instead of appreciating Kami Sama for the divine arrangements that were made for me in order to be able to even finish this far, and instead of appreciating Kami Sama first when I initially received the email, I had instead the heart of complaint, worry, and selfishness for

thinking that I had done everything on my own, when in fact I would not have been able to finish without my mother-in-law's help watching my children or without Kami's guidance.

I believe Kami used Willy to show me not to worry and to remember the importance of practicing faith when things go wrong. That I need to first turn to Kami, and not to panic, because if I have total trust in Kami, Kami will help me. Kami is always listening, protecting and guiding me. Thus if I'm in constant connection with Kami I shouldn't be having problems.

Practicing faith everyday is important for me, to be able to receive Kami's divine arrangement, protection and guidance in my daily life. Though I tend to forget sometimes, I know Kami is always protecting and guiding me. How do I know this? Well, because I have had so many mishaps that have happened that could have easily become something worse.

Starting from the most recent, *just to mention a few*:

- 1.) Just last week, I was getting ready to go to evening service. I laid Matthew down in the stroller then I turned around to adjust Christopher's hat when I heard something rolling down the drive way. I turned around to see Matthew rolling down from the top of our drive way all the way down onto the curb, almost flipping over to the side onto the street. I was so scared that the stroller would tip over, and Matthew, who was not strapped in at all, would bounce out of the stroller.
- 2.) When I gave birth to Matthew, my bleeding would not stop, I had such heavy blood clotting that my red blood count was very low, and the doctors had to give me a shot to help my uterus contract harder.
- 3.) Christopher had to go to Emergency to get x-rays taken because he had smashed his pinky on the door as I was shutting the bathroom door. Later that evening, Madeline came running to tell me that Christopher was stuck. I found him in the bathroom with his head and upper body submerged and flipped over into the tub full of water.
- 4.) Willy stabbed himself on the hand with a sharp knife and had to be taken to the hospital in an ambulance. Finally,
- 5.) Madeline's outbreak of Herpes on her stomach.

As a parent, I want to protect my children from any harm, and, going back and reviewing everything that had happened, I realized I can only protect them only so much with only my strength, the harsh reality of life and death flashed by my head. How easily my children or even my own life can be taken away. Without Kami's protection and guidance how much more mishaps I may have to go through.

To seek divine blessings only when we are sick or in trouble is not receiving true divine blessing. We receive true divine blessings continuously when we practice faith and seek divine blessings in our daily lives. As I look at my own faith, I am reminded and tell myself, this is why I practice faith, this is why I come to church to pray and to seek toritsugi mediation. I practice faith to seek Kami's continued protection and guidance.

Teachings:

If you practice faith in Kami, you will become close to Kami. Kami will then bestow divine blessings and turn major misfortunes into minor ones, and will take away the minor mishaps. Those who say that they practice faith but are still in hard times, do not yet know the true virtue of Kami. You should realize that misfortunes cannot be fully understood by man. Even among devout believers, there are some who stop practicing faith because they experienced great misfortunes. They cut the roots of their faith instead of practicing faith to receive divine blessings that can cut the roots of their misfortunes. This is because they do not realize the true virtue of Kami. When people practice faith, they should know the true virtue of Kami.

Gorikai III: Jinkyu Kyogoroku 32-2,3

Pray to have major misfortunes turned into minor ones. Also pray to have the minor misfortunes cleared away. Try and slowly pour a tub of water from on top of the roof. This is like a minor misfortune. Pouring it all at once is an example of a major misfortune. Practice faith, and like the water being poured out slowly, have major misfortunes turn into minor ones. Then your irreverences will be cleared away and you'll be blessed with prosperity.

Gorikai I: Saito Sojiro 18-1,2

When people continually experience misfortunes while practicing this faith, they often come to worship saying, "This must be some kind of curse. This must be a punishment." But what reason would Kami have for punishing His beloved children? Kami is trying to say that you should be careful. People should renew their hearts and practice faith, so that their misfortunes will become divine blessings.

Gorikai III: Jinkyu Kyogoroku 2-1,2

I hope that sharing my personal experiences will help us realize how much protection and guidance we all are also receiving from Kami and the importance of, like the teaching says, having major misfortunes turn into minor ones and having minor ones cleared away into none, so that we can have continued protection and guidance from Kami in our daily lives.

Let us not forget Kami's teachings and let us practice our faith through understanding Ikigami Konko Daijin's way of life so that every one of us can receive divine blessings the way our founder Konko Daijin did. Thank you.

8/2004 MY FIRST FTI (FAITH TRAINING INSTITUTE) EXPERIENCE

by Mr. Dan Jackson

I really did not know what to expect at the FTI, but I was really glad and thankful to go. I had wanted to go for the past 7 years but different things had happened each year preventing it. Also I believe Kami was not ready for me to go until this year, and Kami was testing me. The reason why I wanted to go for so long was to learn more about Konkokyo, also how I could teach it to others. However, now I believe that Kami also wanted me to teach my two children as well. Now after going I found how much more I need to learn and study.



The first feeling going was elating and very spiritual. I was trying to concentrate as much as possible, but the first thing Todd Sensei asked us to do was turn our cell phones to silent. At this time, Teresa and I were finalizing our house and had some issues arise. I thought that all of the issues were dealt with before I had left. However, during his class I had received 4 phone calls from my realtor, wife, and mortgage broker. I believe that this was one more test on my faith. So instead of worrying too much (I still was concerned) I ended up praying while Todd Sensei was teaching. The prayer was I hope he hurries so I can make my phone calls. That was a joke. Nevertheless, really I prayed so I could be patient and rely on Kami to help me through the situation. Returning their call they informed me that someone by the name of “Dan Jackson” had a judgment for \$18,000.

My heart had dropped to the ground because I thought even though I knew it was not me, it possibly might prevent from purchasing our house. So, during an activity, I walked with my partner back to the dorm to get the re-charger for my phone, but I did not have a pen to write down the important phone numbers. My partner, Brian, offered to input the numbers on his phone so I could call. I believe that was a blessing that he was there and offered to do that and to help me out (Thank you Brian).

After getting the numbers and calling the lawyer who filed the judgment for a Dan Jackson incorrectly, I did another silent prayer to myself and asked for guidance on how to deal with this expediently. I believe I received the answer, as I asked them to call my mortgage broker and the title company to have it cleared up. They realized they had made a huge error, and soon afterwards, I received 3 more phone calls to verify that it was taken care of with apologies from the people who misfiled the incorrect information. I again prayed and thanked Kami for taking care of us.

Of course I was extremely happy at this time and very thankful that I was able to both deal with business and be able to go to the FTI at the same time. In fact I could even say it was one of the many best days of my life. It made me even more thankful that I was able to attend FTI to be able to share with my experiences with others with the situation that had just happened.

During the rest of the FTI, we learned a lot about the different disciples of Konkokyo, which was one of the highlights of the FTI. It was something that I really did not know—the history of why certain teachings were about, and how and why they came to be. This was all new to me and very fascinating to get inside them and try to figure them out. What made it interesting was putting a face and the history of the individual behind the teaching instead of just reading them. We also all shared our stories of how and why we became Konko believers and who brought us to the faith. It was very nice to learn so much about everybody there and the stories they shared. It made you understand each and everyone that was in the room that much more.

But all in all, I was very grateful to finally attend, and plan on attending many more as well if time provides.

(During a break at FTI, Master Foosball Dan takes on two single-handedly!)



9/2004 Newsletter - Mini Sermon by Rev Michie Uzunoe

The other day, Andy sensei said “I heard Kami Sama’s voice for the first time.” Yesterday, Dan said “I have been able to pray more everyday after I have come back from the FTI. Then I got a promotion right away.”

Maybe some people may say, Oh! That was his imagination or just a coincidence. If you say or think that way, then that’s it, nothing can happen anymore.

The important part was that they thought and received the happenings as Kami’s blessings. If you practice faith, this is the key to receiving continuous blessings.

Our Founder practiced faith this way, taking everything as Kami’s blessings no matter what happened to him, then he became Ikigami Konko Daijin.

Let’s practice faith true way to receive blessings fully.

My First Pilgrimage – by Mr. William Chin

Hello, my name is William Chin, currently serving as the Portland Church's ShintoKai President. I'm also the husband of Rev. Amy Uzunoe-Chin, and we are the proud parents of two little pip squeaks; Madeline & Christopher. Today, I've been asked to share my experiences & thoughts on our family's pilgrimage to Japan for the Founder's 120th Anniversary.



First and foremost, I would like to thank my mother in law and her mom for making this trip possible for all of us. Without their hard work in planning and providing the financial resources available for this trip, I don't think I'll be up here with the opportunity to share my experiences.

It has been almost a month since our return to the United States. As most of you know, I have never been to Japan before. However, the three-cities in eight days is not a tour package I'd recommend to anyone traveling with kids!!

When I was first approached to speak about my experiences in Japan, I was quite hesitant at first, because I really did not know what to talk about. Homesickness, exhaustion, and frustration were topics which first came to mind. However, once I began to sit down and recap the events, I soon realized that the many positives of the trip far outweighed the negatives. Blessings were everywhere; from having a safe plane ride to and from, to Daniel returning safely to his parents after getting lost in Osaka International Airport. I also enjoyed the opportunity to be able to spend time with the extended family, but I think I actually learned more about than I needed too!! HA HAA!!!

I remember the anxiety leading up to our trip to Japan. I was in constant struggle to prepare myself for this trip; most of my vacations have been to Oregon camp sites and the occasional excursion to the local shopping malls!! As the countdown to departure continued, I found myself struggling, and at times overwhelmed with the feelings of uncertainty. As a father, I was quite concerned about the impacts to my two young children on this trip. I remember voicing my concerns to my wife, Amy; I probably rattled of about one hundred "what if scenarios" to her. These scenarios ranged from "what if we lose our luggage?" to "what if we ran out of baby formula?" Amy just smiled, and said, "*don't worry, everything will be ok*". At the time, this was the answer which I was **not** looking for....I wanted her to assure me that **everything** was going to be ok and she didn't.

I remember becoming even more frustrated, even to the point of questioning the purpose of this trip. The day before our departure, a two-ton boulder must of hit me (I can be quite hard-headed, it would take at least that to get my attention); I finally realized that she *would not* be telling the truth if she told

me everything would be ok; it would be the same as telling a 4th yr engineering student that he will still graduate, even if he failed physics. Just like me, Amy did not know what to expect on this journey, unlike me, her strength and faith allowed her view these “uncertainties” as blessings and treat them as such. I am so blessed to have a wonderful wife by my side, but of course, she is sitting next to me with a two-ton boulder dangling over my head!

I decided to jump on the bandwagon and go to Japan. We left Portland on 9/30. After a grueling 11 hour flight from San Francisco, we finally arrived at Osaka International Airport. Here’s another tip when traveling with children: bring lots of snacks and at least two bottles of Benadryl!!

I noticed in Japan, everyone moved quite fast. Once we cleared customs, our first destination was the New Miyako Hotel in the city of Kyoto. I will forever call Japan the country of vending machines; there was practically **one** on **every** corner!! Your typical choices were available; sodas, bottled water, candy, etc. The not so typical items, such as French fries and beer were my favorite vending selections in Japan. Taxi’s, bicycles and public transit were the popular choices of moving around, our hour train ride was quite pleasant. I noticed that most streets were about half the size of the ones in the states; without any designated sidewalks or bike lanes. One of the biggest shockers was the size of the cars; it seemed like the average car size was the size of a Geo Metro. Let me tell you, a mini-van is really a minivan in Japan!! I saw one; it was about the size of one of the golf carts we use here! After a wonderful family dinner at a real yakiniku rest, we retired for the evening.

The next day, we toured the ancient temples and castles of this beautiful city. We took the subway back to the train station and departed for Nagasaki. One of most amazing sites was the size of train stations in Japan. Each station was like a city within itself; there were countless stores, restaurants. Do you remember the commercials on TV, advertising the use of traveler’s check instead of cash? Well, I always thought that “that would never happen to me”. This is where things started to get real rough- it appeared that someone had stolen our pre-purchased rail passes!! These rail passes acted like a bus pass; we could travel on any train within the time we were there!! I thought to myself, this can’t be happening to us; it only happens in third world countries and Europe, not in Japan? As a result, we had to purchase new train tickets [individually, each trip] for Amy, Madeline and myself.

Like everyone else, I was exhausted and tired. I felt angry and extremely frustrated. How could someone steal these from us? I just hoped that this wasn’t the least of our troubles to come. At this point, everyone was tired, the kids were crying and hungry, Amy wasn’t feeling well, and to top it off- we had to hustle to catch a train!!

I just wanted to turn around and head for home.

I turned to look at Amy, she seemed as calm as a breeze. I realized that I was taking this whole theft the wrong way; it was a blessing that only our rail passes were stolen. It could have been worst; our passports, cash, our luggage with Christopher's formula could have been stolen as well. I felt more relaxed and relieved once we arrived at the Nagasaki [Tsurunominato] Church as I had the pleasure of experiencing my **first** Japanese bath.

The next day, we climbed Mt. Fuji to pay our respects at the Nagasaki Church gravesite. Just kidding, it was just an extremely steep climb to the grave site. The rest of the day was spent sightseeing in Nagasaki with our uncle, cousins, and the sensei from church. We arrived at Okayama feeling the same as our previous arrivals in Kyoto and Nagasaki; exhausted, hungry, and extremely tired. However, there wasn't the constant buzzing and activity which would give one the sense of a metropolitan area. Quite contrary, the rice patties, open farmland, and view of ocean brought upon some feelings of relaxation. It kind of reminded me of a place which the red neck part of me likes to call home- Corvallis, Oregon.

The hotel accommodations were extremely comfortable and convenient; Hombu [Konko Headquarters] was just a short bus ride. In addition, a "blessing" is the only word I can use to describe what transpired later that evening; it appeared that someone somehow had found our rail passes which we had thought were stolen. From what I understood, this person correlated the Portland address on the passes with a Goshinmai from the Portland Church. Some phone calls were made, and he was able to get our rail passes back to us. My heart was filled with so much gratitude toward this person for what he had done, thank you. [Michie Sensei recalls that a Mr. Kawate who lived in Konko Town let people from out of town stay in one of his rooms, which had a Portland Church Goshinmai displayed on his wall he received Uzunoe Sensei years ago. Details are unclear, but it was due to someone who recognized the Portland Goshinmai that was with the rail passes to the Goshinmai in this room, that made the connection to Honbu, to the parent church in Fukuoka. Calling Fukuoka they found out they had already left there and was heading for Tsurunominato, and so on, all the way back to them.]

The next morning, we were finally heading toward Hombu to attend the 120th Anniversary service. I remember seeing several of Amy's pictures while she was completing her studies at the Konko seminary from 1996-1997. But, to actually be there and see the size of the main worship hall for myself was astonishing; the seating capacity of around 12,000 was equivalent to the capacity of the Memorial Coliseum here in Portland!! I was also quite surprised to see so many parishioners attend the 120th Anniversary Service. Hombu was like a living history of the Konko faith even with the crowds of attendees; its serenity was never lost. Once we paid our respects to the

founder, we attended the 120th Anniversary service. Before I saw our current Konko Sama, I had always envisioned him as sort of superhuman being. I found it quite reassuring that he looked like any normal person. As a matter of fact he really looks A-LOT like my own father!

Once the service was over, the first thing which came to my mind was FOOD!! I felt satisfied after I consumed my second bowl of Udon noodles at the local restaurant. Before returning to the hotel, Amy, Madeline, Christopher & I visited the place Amy called “home” for a year (her dormitory where she stayed). The sight of the building, to say the least, was shocking. I’ve previously heard stories about the harsh conditions and lack of western amenities. To best describe it, the dormitory buildings looked like a run down barn which you would only see on reruns of the “Little House on the Prairie”.

If I would have known at the time, my first project as a civil engineer would probably not been designing and building a sewer line, but I would have brought a crew and a bulldozer from the States to level the buildings and erect new ones!! I’d definitely require the installation of western style facilities and a modern sewage facility; not just a hole in the ground!

The next day was our last in Japan. It just seemed like it was just an hour ago since we first got off the plane!! Our trip home was not as grueling, but never the less, it was quite long. Never the less, we did fulfill our pilgrimage to attend the 120th Anniversary service. Just like the *pilgrims* who *journeyed before us* to this great nation on the Mayflower, we had experienced our hardships and obstacles. I’m sure their obstacles and hardships were far more intense than ours; never less; the existence of them warrants the comparison. The original pilgrims arrived on a one way boat ride on the Mayflower; **WE arrived on a Boeing 777**. The original pilgrims most likely had duties and chores to do, such as cooking, cleaning and helping the ship’s crew, **WE, no, I’m sorry, a few of us** watched “Finding Nemo” and a few other movies. The list of comparisons can go on and on.



The original pilgrims arrived on a one way boat ride on the Mayflower; **WE arrived on a Boeing 777**. The original pilgrims most likely had duties and chores to do, such as cooking, cleaning and helping the ship’s crew, **WE, no, I’m sorry, a few of us** watched “Finding Nemo” and a few other movies. The list of comparisons can go on and on.

Through my many observations, I’ve realized the importance of this pilgrimage was not so much in attending the 120th Anniversary, but in the journey itself, in which our faith was tested over, and over, and over; and over again! Nevertheless, life in its entirety is a long journey; we need to take a step back to look at all of the blessings which we receive on a daily basis.

You just got to look, our blessings are at every corner, just like the vending machines in Japan!!

6/2004 Newsletter - Mini Sermon by Rev. Lisa Uzunoe

Yesterday, Andy called to say thank you to Kami-sama. He was just thinking what a waste the \$11 fee was for the extra rental insurance coverage because nothing ever happens, when suddenly, a big rock hit and chipped the windshield. Because he had paid that extra \$11, they would cover up to \$1,000 in damages and it would not affect our regular insurance.

Many times we may feel our daily faith practice has no results. Just because you went to a service, do you see results? No. But like this incident, if you hadn't been covered, then when something happens, it becomes a very big problem. That little extra goes a long way. Don't doubt blessings. Know that your efforts in faith will not go to waste.

10/2004 Newsletter - Mini sermon by Rev. Lisa Uzunoe

In preparing to teach a class at the upcoming Konko Faith Training Seminar (FTI), I have been thinking about and trying to understand the concept of our Founder's "Jitsui teinei" (meticulous, conscientious, and sincerity), and how to apply that to my daily faith training.

This morning Jubei woke up hungry, so we had breakfast (...3:30am). As always, we said our "before meal prayer", and after finished, the "after meal prayer." But as I was clearing the table, Jubei (curling up sleepily on the floor) was mumbling, "Gohan [rice], Thaa—nk you!" "Niku [meat], Thank you!" "Imo [potato], Thank you!" and "Carrots, Tha—nk you!" Surprised, and amazed, I suddenly realized this was how to be meticulous, conscientious, and sincere in our lives. Not just saying "Thank you for this meal we have received..." but to and for each specific individual part.

Now I remember our grandma would have us pray at night to Kami, but also to our pillows, blankets, and bed for a good night's sleep w/o bad dreams. I really feel this makes the items happy. It's like your boss (or someone you look up to) saying thank you not to the whole office, but coming to you specifically, smiling and saying, "Thank you."

Through this (as Michie sensei pointed out), we can see that when pray and are seeking to understand and have Kami's heart, Kami will provide answers. But because these answers are not always so evident, we need to keep an eye/ear out so as not to miss them.

...The Parent Kami of the Universe borrows the voice of humans to convey teachings. Those who practice faith should listen well, even to children's lullabies, as you might hear Kami's teachings

(Gii Fukushima, Gihe'e)

Thank you Jubei!

3/2005 Newsletter – “Spiritual Growth 101” by Miho Uzunoe

[It’s always wonderful to hear that people are growing in faith no matter where they are. Here is a faith story from Miho Uzunoe who is a freshman at the University of Oregon in Eugene. Editor’s notes from interview.]



When I started talking to a new friend down the hall, she started telling me about her problems regarding her grandfather. Finding out he had cancer winter term last year, although she tried to put the idea aside, her grades dropped dramatically the next term as she struggled to deal with it emotionally.

In this fall term, her grandfather passed away. Had a hard time, but thought she could get over it and pick back up again by winter term. But was still struggling, even more now because when she went to visit his gravesite on his birthday in January, she could not find it. Her family lives near the coast but his gravesite is in Eugene, so she was the only one who could easily go. She took gifts for him, and a lighthouse from her little sister who wanted to give grandpa one of his favorite things. But unable to find it after circling in the long grass for over an hour even with a map, she left the gifts with the keeper (who couldn’t leave the desk to help her). Telling me about it, she kept repeating “I couldn’t find him. I couldn’t find him.”

Listened to her, then tried to give her different perspective and talked to her about Founder’s life and faith. And even gave her the Konko guidebook, “Shine from Within.” I didn’t want to push anything on her, but she insisted I wasn’t, so we kept talking. As she had her grandfather’s picture, but kept it shut away, I felt she was running away from accepting what happened and told her she should take it out and talk to him like he was still there. And that maybe she wasn’t ready yet to accept it, that’s why she couldn’t find the gravesite, but when time came, her grandfather would come to her.

From then on, things started happening, making me feel like his spirit was pushing me to do things, see things or clues to help her. She came over to my room once, and looking on my wall said, “Oh, that’s my grandfather’s favorite flower!” It was a framed picture of a Cala lily papa gave me for Christmas.

Then we went to the mall together, we ran across silk Cala lilies, just like the one in the picture. I really felt like we were being guided by her grandfather’s spirit. Later, wanted to find real flowers for her, but the florist didn’t have any. But even better, was a potted one I found at a grocery store, their last one.

Repotted it in a prettier pot and gave it to her with a picture of her grandparents she had that I enlarged and framed (I had just found my photo paper the other day). She was really happy.

Everything was so perfect and going so smoothly, I knew we would find her grandfather. But I think she was afraid to go to the cemetery again because she was afraid she would not be able to find his grave again. So, I arranged a ride with a friend and told her I'd help her find him. Soon after arriving in the general area, a little surprised I said, "I found it!" So soon that my friend thought I was kidding. But I did. I realized it was the lighthouse at the gravesite that caught my eye, the lighthouse I remember her talking about from her sister. They had just recently cut the lawn, so it was visible. I felt the grandfather and Kami had given me little clues all the time to this point, to help find him.

Even my friend kept saying, "wow" at all the little things/clues, and the way things were happening. She asked me if it surprised me too, but I told her "no, it's what I grew up with." Now, when she talks about her grandfather, she's not sad, but happy, and celebrates his life instead of hiding it.

What I learned through this experience and want to share is "Don't look in the box. Such a big world, more than we can think. Never thought mitama (spirit) can come to me, but did, and helped!"

Now I know why my mother helps people the way she does. She gives and does so much for others, I always wondered WHY she could spend so much money for others. I believe it's the feeling you get when the other person becomes happy.

"Helping someone is SO much greater than making yourself happy. Makes you 10 times happier than by yourself!"

I am thankful to know I can be useful to people/the world. Thankful to my parents and the Konko Faith who taught me this.

12/2005 Newsletter – Faith Thoughts by Karen Sunada

Remembering my Dad, I can't believe it's been five years since our dad has passed on. I still remember his wonderful smile and the words he said to us on Christmas Eve, "I'll be watching over you." I know he is at this moment.



I really got to know our dad better while he was staying at our house during his illness. He never gave up. He prayed to Kami-sama morning, noon and night. I believe his faith helped him to be strong mentally and spiritually.

Not until recently did I become involved with the Konko Church. It has helped me to become a thankful and patient person.

I still have a lot to learn but I will grow with this faith and I have a new outlook on what's important. My faith in Kami-Sama and our parents love has given me the best gift of all. Thank you, thank you, thank you.

2005 Mini Sermon - What's in a Name? by Rev Lisa Uzunoe

When we found out I was pregnant with a boy again, we started thinking about names. Wanting to have one of my father's kanji characters in it, 信治 Nobu-haru, we thought about Nobuyasu (grandfather's name), Nobunaga (too ruthless), Mitsunobu (uncle's name), Harunobu, Haru...???

They all sounded too foreign and difficult to spell or pronounce in English. We wanted something both Japanese and English speakers could pronounce easily. Andy wanted Musashi or Hanzo. (Great swordsman/shinobi perhaps, but not exactly what I had in mind.)

One day when Andy Sensei was doing goyo at the Mediation Seat, the name "Genji" came to him. When we asked Michie Sensei about it, she said, "Genji is a myoji, a last name... Well, but it can be written

元治 which uses the 'haru' from Nobuharu to read Gen-ji." Who knew?



It can mean the "beginning of the peace or calm" so Michie Sensei deemed it a good name. Thus, our second son's name was given to us by Kami Sama through Sacred Mediation.

Highlights 1995-2005

- 1996 Rev. Michie Uzunoe becomes Asst Head Minister
- 1997 Rev. Amy Uzunoe becomes ordained
Revs. Takeuchi open Chicago Propagation Hall
- 2000 Church Community Hall built
Rev. Richard and Miya Dusek transfer from Airaku Church
- 2001 70th Anniversary
Revs. Andrew & Lisa Uzunoe become ordained
Rev. Nobuharu Uzunoe transfers to Gardena (HM)
- 2002 Rev. Michie Uzunoe succeeds as 3rd Head Minister
of the Konko Church of Portland
- 2003 Sunday School camping started (Florence, OR)
- 2004 Rev. Andrew Uzunoe becomes Assistant Head Minister
Rev. Richard & Miyako Dusek open Tacoma Fellowship
- 2005 Hosted KCNA & KMH Joint Conference (Camp Angelos)

Konko Chicago Propagation Hall - Rev. Masanori Takeuchi 1997



Community Hall Construction - 2000



Raymond, Fumio Kuroye, Rev. Nobuharu Uzunoe, William Chin

Rev. Nobuharu Uzunoe, Frank Sunada, Randy Akagi



Rev. Michie Uzunoe as Third Head Minister - 2002



Konko Fellowship of Tacoma
2004
Rev. Dick and Miyako Dusek



**2005 KCNA & KMH Joint Conference
Camp Angelos Site in Corbett, Oregon**



Chapter 5: Fruits of Labor 2006-2016

When Michie Sensei handed over the head ministership to Andy Sensei, she told us that when the church and believers begin to receive great blessings from now on, don't think that it is by your strength or faith. It is from the many many years and efforts of the pioneering families and ministers, believers and work of past Head ministers that have tilled, shaped, fertilized, watered, and cared for this sacred ground. Due to these efforts, this nutrient rich garden will grow anything quickly, fully and beautifully, even if seeds were just thrown in. We were inheriting this fertile garden of virtue—of course blessings will come easy. But don't just eat the fruits. Take care of the garden, teach future generations to take care of and nourish their gardens, so they will continue to bear fruit for generations.

In this time, we lost most of our elders. So many trees of the forest fell that it felt an era was ending. Yet each one of them received so many blessings of timing, love, family, closure and comfort, that it was incredible to witness and be a part of. Truly, they have shown how faith brings peace to our families, and it is a wonder to be a part of this cycle of life.



*When great trees of the forest fall, they build our very foundation
and leave a trail in the canopy we feel will never be filled.*

*We walk the cycle of life in time when trees become towering tops, reaching the young trees surrounding them -
giving them the power to reach further to only themselves.*

They see in the fallen trees a gift to be shared and share it with others, spreading and sharing this precious gift.

*The kinds of family and love plants do not feel nor do they grow, multiply or bloom
or they live in our arms and spread or finally lead to the road.*

3/2006 Newsletter - Mini Sermon by Rev. Lisa Uzunoe

There is a section called “Naiden” in the Gorikai from disciple Rev. Norio Sato where he said he was so disappointed when he gave an article to a believer who came for guidance, because the believer read and returned it in five minutes. He said that person only took five minutes but he could meditate for hours and days recalling the event.



This came to make sense to me last night. Michie sensei said Emily (four years old) was mumbling to herself while playing the other day, “ka, ki, ku, ke, ko” (a line from the Japanese alphabet).

Then, last night Jubei (three years old) lying in bed, was throwing out words trying to find ones that rhymed, and laughing to himself when they did. We just had a Japanese lesson at church, and I had just read “Mother Goose Nursery Rhymes” to Jubei before bed. Observing these behaviors by children – constantly repeating what they have recently heard and seen—made me realize the importance of repetition in order to learn.

I believe this is what Rev. Norio Sato meant when he said he could meditate on it for hours. The faith experiences we have, the messages from Kami we receive—we shouldn’t just say, “oh I get it,” in a few minutes and go on. But just like the children, keep those experiences in our hearts and minds—mull over them from time to time so they will become a part of our very being.

I’ve always been taught to learn 10 things from one experience. The other nine things come from this process of reviewing it over and over again. In this way, those precious messages, especially those from painful experiences, will not go to waste. It really is amazing, the things you can learn from children.

Seek Mediation Anytime—by Rev. Lisa Uzunoe

I had a dream one day where a believer was sitting in the sofa chair outside of the church office waiting for someone. Unable to wait any longer, she got up to leave. Just then, Andy Sensei and I came out of the office, we almost missed her. Waking up, I was curious as to what the dream meant, so wrote an email to the believer about it. Turns out her father-in-law was ill so they were going to fly out the next morning. She wanted to contact the church, but it was late and figured we were busy so didn’t. Was happy to be able to seek Mediation before leaving.

I have had so many experiences like this. These dreams are not for me, but Kami Sama letting believers know their prayers are heard. The ministers may not always be able to reply immediately, but by foot, phone, text, or email—do try to seek Mediation. Your heart of seeking Mediation will reach Kami.

9/2006 Newsletter - Keeping a Kind Heart by Rev. Amy Uzunoe-Chin

My father has always told me that my most valuable asset is my “true kind heart”. However, too often, I let my emotional side take control. Since my last sermon in May, I have once again been shown by Kami my shortcomings.



This year my frustration with my husband, William, must have been building up. I was complaining often about the little things, like: your not home enough, the grass isn't cut, the clothes are on the floor, you put too much clothes in the washer mixed with light and dark clothing, stop being so grouchy, or put the toilet seat down!

Well, it must have been about 2 months ago when I was at Church and I called my husband to see if I could drop off his Bento at work, since he forgot to take it with him. When he answered, he said, “what is it?” he said it like he wasn't too happy to hear what I was about to tell him. Well, right away, I was already irritated by his comment, then I felt like he had the nerve to ask me if I could go buy him some Chinese food and drop it off for him instead. Though Michie Sensei didn't tell me at this time, she saw through my frustrated words and emotional feelings, like it was flashed on a television screen, of “okay fine, after I put all my effort in making you this bento, you don't appreciate it and you don't want to eat to it”. Well, at the end I ended up not taking him any bento.

So, I went home and started to clean the house instead. I was cleaning my bathtub when Matthew came up to me and started to point at his mouth. As I was asking what he wanted, he threw up all over me. I immediately, ran out to the kitchen area to investigate what he had eaten, and found an open bottle of *Walgreen's Waltussin Cough Syrup* almost empty. I immediately called church but nobody answered. I called William at work but he didn't answer either. I then immediately called Matthew's Pediatrician and Poison Control. After they confirmed that he had drank over the toxic amount, I was told to take him to the Emergency Room. Before taking him to the ER, I took him to church to do Toritsugi to Kami, however, when I got there and saw Michie Sensei was home, I forgot to do Toritsugi and just dropped Christopher off with only a short explanation and sped off to the hospital.

As I sat there holding Matthew, forcing liquid Charcoal down his throat, I couldn't help but ask myself, Why? Where was I lacking in my faith? I still couldn't find a concrete answer. Only when we were released from the hospital and when I went to Church did Michie Sensei remind me of my lack of kind heart and words toward William that day. She told me I should

understand and appreciate what he does for me and the children. He deserves to eat what makes him happy. Even then, I didn't believe this was the sole problem. I just thought to myself, "nah, this can't be the main reason", just because of the way I talked to him? I thought to myself, "I talk to him like this all the time!" Well, Kami Sama once again tried to show me the way. That evening I don't know really why, but, I decided to skim through the Konko guidebook "Shine from Within" when I stumbled upon this story called "A Blanket" (pg. 23).

After reading this story, I thought, though the situation is a little different, the message of the importance of patience, kind heart and self renewal in order to receive any kind of divine blessings is seamless. I was not able to prevent what happened to Matthew because my heart was clouded by my shortcoming, because my heart was not focused toward Kami.

Just like, if I took my contact lenses or glasses off I would not be able to see clearly what was ahead. This is when I understood why, I could not get through to church or William when I called. My heart was not strongly connected with Kami, my heart was not facing Kami, the communication line was detached.

It's easy to tell people not to get angry even if there is something to get angry about than actually practicing this. Our human emotions are very strong, however, if we are able to channel that into changing that into blessings through our daily practice of faith, the divine blessings and divine virtues we will receive will be tremendously immense. Even Konko Daijin, our founder had to practice this, when the Mountain Priests came and called him names and tore his altar down.

I have also come to understand that no matter what the situation I may be facing, even if I think that the other person is wrong, I should not let it get to me emotionally. For me as a person who is a straight shooter, and being able to tell things or like to tell things like it is, this is very hard to do. However, if I get emotionally angry, this blanket of anger covers my heart and the ability to cover others with my warm heart becomes impossible. What is critical is whether if I have a calm, kind heart, because having a kind heart enables us not only to see clearly but to understand that in order to receive divine blessings, regardless of the situation around us or others, truly depends upon our own single heart toward Kami. Being angry or saying harsh words doesn't get us anywhere but more problems.

So, please, through my mistakes, I hope and pray everyone can understand the importance, and practice faith with a heart of kindness. The key to receiving great divine blessings is through practicing the ability to attain peace and happiness within ourselves, which enables us the power to help change those around us through our heart of kindness and joy. Thank you!

11/2007 Newsletter- About Sacred Rice (Goshinmai) by Rev. Michie Uzunoe

(Gorikai III Jinkyu-Kyogoroku 13)

Sacred rice has received Kami's blessings, so you should treat it respectfully. A person who falls seriously ill can receive divine blessings and be saved with just one grain of sacred rice. Konko Daijin once said, "A person will be able to receive divine virtue after receiving a thousand Goshinmai while practicing faith." Isn't this something to be grateful for?



It's not that the number of Goshinmai is a barometer of faith, but since we can not see divine virtue by our physical eyes, it does shows how much and how often we tried to face Kami, or get close to Kami.

Our Founder received a few grains from Kami when he was saved from his critical illness at 42 years old. Receiving the grains the Founder received life itself. Afterwards he was instructed by Kami to make goshinmai give to people who came to worship.

My parent minister taught me about Goshinmai when I was young, saying to save all Goshinmai. Then if you do not use up the Goshinmai while you are living, give thanks to Kami for the blessings of protection and health, and burn them with your body when you die. My grandmother had almost five thousand goshinmai paper. Three years before she died, she had an accident that burned most the bottom half of her body. It took one full year to recover, and she used exactly all the Goshinmai she had to heal. But it saved her life.

Goshinmai is a crystal of prayers because it holds Kami and Ikigami Konko Daijins' prayer, the prayer of the minister who made the Goshinmai, and the prayer of the person who receives it in gratitude. This why we have to respect it and take care of it nicely. Inside rice grains: You can eat as is or cook with rice. Inner paper: Using good quality Japanese paper (made from plant), so you can eat (good fiber); or apply as a bandage for wounds (strong absorption properties, stays on until healed, add layers as needed).

After using, don't forget thanks! Outer wrapping: you can burn or recycle. If you don't have to use your Goshinmai, please keep them in a box in/on your altar and appreciate you and your family's health!

4/2008 Newsletter Sermon - Forget Me Not by Rev. Amy Uzunoe-Chin

Good morning everyone. I just wanted to let everyone know that this topic for my sermon today was in part inspired by the true heart and actions demonstrated by Erin Akagi during the Spring Memorial Service.

Like all of us, Mitama's like to be happy. They like to be remembered and recognized and not forgotten for who they were and are pleased when we honor them in daily prayers and monthly services. I have known Erin Akagi for all of her life and treat her like one of my own sisters.

Through the actions of her parents, Erin has learned the importance of practicing faith and paying respect to the Mitama's. I commend her parents for showing her the true way of faith through their way of life. I especially noticed this at the last service when she offered her ancestors her yummy, home made cookies!! Her independent action of offering cookies really touched me and I was really proud of her. She may not have realized this at the time, but this one simple action is actually a big step toward the development of her own piggy bank of "divine virtue", which will be passed down to the next generation. I believe that her family's Mitamas are truly blessed and happy.

We sometimes take for granted what it really means to realize "What make Mitamas' Happy?" Just because we cannot see them anymore doesn't mean that they do not need to be loved or remembered, actually it is the opposite, they do not want to be forgotten.

For example, this past Thursday was the three year mark of the passing of Willy's grandmother. I remember the challenges which he faced going trying to make it to San Francisco before her death. Just to give you a *brief highlight* of this long and detailed story: First his Van broke down around 7pm in Corning, California, which is about 2 hours from San Francisco. Having no choice but to stay overnight at a motel, he booked himself on Amtrak for the next day. The bus which shuttled him to the Amtrak Station, however, about half-way there, started having problems and he had to re-board unto another bus. Then, when he finally got on Amtrak, the train's engine broke down as well.

It wasn't until later that we found out it was Willy's Grandmother's wish that she did not want any of her grandchildren seeing during her last moments. She passed away that morning between 2-3a.m. This was about the same time I awoke from a dream I had about her, it was a good dream, and she was looking at me, smiling as she held out her arms toward me, like she wanted to give me a big warm hug. Deep down inside, I knew that she had already passed away or was about to. Around 5pm that evening he called me to tell me that he had finally made it to Grandma's apartment by foot, for he

didn't trust a taxi from the train station (at this point, he didn't trust any mechanical vehicle). Despite the exhausting journey, he was more disappointed at that fact that she was already gone. However, to change the subject, I asked him what color she liked, because I was planning to offer some flowers for her on our altar.

Her favorite color was purple, so I went to buy some flowers and pray for her peace and happiness upon our altar. Later that week, Willy was asking me if it would be okay to bring back some of her ashes, knowing that he was the male Chin of the family, we also discussed about taking care of his Grandmother's Spirit in long term. I remember thinking that I would be honored to take care of her Spirit, but at the same time I didn't want to offend her if she didn't want us to.

About the same time that week I was planning to plant the flower pot outside. This is when I read the information stick that was staked in the flower pot that I offered on our altar. I didn't notice it before, but it read, "Get Mee". This sent a chill up my back. This clearly answered my doubts about whether if she wanted us to take care of her.

Well, going through this experience and knowing that her 3 year memorial was coming, on Wednesday, last week, I had reminded Willy to not forget to remember her on her day, but Willy did not seem to be concerned and told me to get whatever I wanted for the offerings to her. Later that evening, Willy had noticed that he was having some hesitation issues with his car on the way to work. (déjà vu). At this point, I reminded him of the significance of Thursday, the 13th. He still didn't seem too concerned.

The next day, on Thursday *the 13th*, I received a phone call from Willy telling me that his van had just died as he pulled into work. Even though the cause was just a bad ignition switch, he told me that he would be leaving ON TIME from work to go buy some Chinese food for his Grandmother's offering on this day. Yeah, I guess you can say though he couldn't see her, he may have felt her presence.

Mitamas cannot talk anymore like when they were living, but they still try to communicate to us through using other means, whether if it is to get our attention to tell us something or to remind us that they still want to be recognized, remembered, cared for and be happy.

So, let us remember to, as this Konko Faith teaches us in Gorikai II, Takahashi Tomie 33, "Place fertilizer at the roots of a tree, then its branches will grow lush. Respect your ancestor and parents, then you will prosper." In other words, take good care of our ancestors, for we will be happy, because if we are happy, we will be able to grow big and strong, and our family will be able to succeed and prosper from generation to generation to come. Thank you.

3/2010 Newsletter – Faith by Tomiye Akagi

Though my faith is far from being perfect, Tenchi Kane No Kami has patience and continues to guide me through my life, and provides me with more blessings than I can ever imagine. Faith does not develop in a vacuum but through our relationships with Kami and the many people who comes into our lives. Through daily prayer, the foundation my grandparents and parents have given me, and the guidance of my minister, Michie Uzunoe, my faith in Kami grows stronger.



Daily Prayer

Formal prayer and attending services are ways for me to show respect to Kami, but I enjoy more my personal daily prayers where I speak to Kami one-on-one. Always taught that praying is important, it's only been about the last year that I have been praying (almost) everyday. What I found was that my grandparents and parents were right (which they often have been). My prayers begin with appreciation, followed by apologies and requests. Through these daily prayers, I have received a few revelations.

Health and happiness are important in our lives; but there are so many blessings Kami gives us, and so many ones I take for granted—the sun, rain, air, water and just being alive. The mitama have built the foundation upon which we live; but until a few short months ago, I never thanked Kami for allowing our Founder to teach us about Kami—how basic is that?

In the beginning, I only offered a general apology for my shortcomings; but now I have an expanded list of specific shortcomings, understanding that there are so many more. About three weeks ago, Kami helped me realize that it's not okay to apologize for something without trying to “fix” it. Just saying I'm sorry isn't enough. I need to make an honest effort to lessen my faults.

Before, making requests for the well-being of others was much easier than asking for my well-being. However, if I thank Kami for my health and happiness, shouldn't I ask Kami for continued health and happiness? Asking for continued blessings seems like an acknowledgement and appreciation of those blessings received. With daily prayer, I try to leave my life in Kami's hands, which has resulted in more calmness and less stress.

Foundation of Faith.

I thank Kami for the foundation of my faith that comes that from my grandparents and parents. As a child, church services, sermons and literature were pretty much in Japanese, which I didn't understand. Therefore, much of my faith came through listening to my grandparents and parents, and through observation. They taught me that faith and life are inseparable, so I watched them living their faith. For me, keeping a Kami heart is not easy; but I try to show respect, kindness and understanding to others. (Note: As I said in the beginning, my faith is far from being perfect. For some reason, trying to keep a Kami heart with my family is most difficult.

I apologize to my family, and thank them for their patience and understanding.) My mother, who probably learned this from her parents, taught me to look for the silver lining in things that happen; and that my prayers to Kami may not be answered the way I want and to trust in Kami. I have yet to reach their level of sincerity and may never. However, faith development is never-ending.

Guidance from Sensei.

I am grateful to Kami for allowing my faith to be guided by Rev. Michie Uzunoe. She is sincere, respectful, humble and empathetic. She honors Kami and truly cares about people. She lives her faith.

Thank you, Kami-sama for blessing me with so much. Thank you for bringing so many people into my life to guide me along. The level of my faith may waver, but I will always believe in Tenchi Kane No Kami.

4/2010 Newsletter – Kami teaches us even while we sleep

by Mrs. Eiko Kuroye

I was sleeping when I woke up in the middle of the night to go to the bathroom. As I struggled to sit up and reach for my walker, I noticed a female dwarf sitting on my toilet seat in my bathroom right across from my bedroom. I also noticed that the dwarf had only one leg. Was this a dream?



It has been over a year since I fell and fractured my hip, but I still have a hard time moving around. That particular morning my husband slept on the couch because it felt better on his aching back, so I tried getting up by myself.

The dwarf just watched me as I struggled for about 10 minutes to grab the handles of my walker. Suddenly, she darted across into my bedroom and helped push the walker towards me to where I could reach it. This small person with only one leg came to help ME. It amazed me! Her heart and compassion really touched my heart.

Today, I feel like "compassion" is lacking in our lives. Kami teaches us that compassion is a very important part of practicing faith. I realized that Kami had shown me not only how selfish I was and lacked deep appreciation, but learned that no matter how small or handicap a person may be, helping others is possible. Kami has given us the ability to love. Konko Sama has taught us to love others, help others, have compassion.

I was truly humbled when Kami opened my eyes to show me that I had not been appreciating my life, my handicap and that I can and should do more than feel sorry for myself or think that I can't do anything.

I realized that all the blessings I had received from Kami, whether it was when I fell and fractured my bone or again fell and split my scalp open last month, my appreciation was not enough. This is a disrespect to Kami for the life that has been given to me.

Kami has given me the gift of compassion, I was selfish to think that I couldn't do anything. I need to try harder to appreciate my health, the people who support me, especially my husband Fumio and practice a more single-hearted faith. I will practice faith harder to become a true believer, deepen my faith and be able to help others instead of always relying on others and view my handicap as a "handicap" and broaden my heart of compassion and love. Thank you.

5/2010 Newsletter – Faith Story by Dan Jackson

Well this is the month that I got the pleasure to write an article. There are many things that I can write about. But I am going to share a couple of recent things that has happened.



First, I would like to write about my Grandmother who just passed away in February. My Grandmother was a nice woman who received many blessings in her life. She was also a very religious woman who had me Baptized in a Baptist church. I have many fond memories of praying with her when I would go to visit. But I also have some interesting memories of her type of church.

In the Konko Faith there are teachings that state, speak no ill of any other religion, now I am just writing about my own personal experiences. I remember even at a young age going to services, the preacher would say if you do not believe in Jesus and ask for his forgiveness or believe in our religion you will go to hell. Even though I was young I always thought to myself that there was something not right with that picture. Thinking to myself what about the Catholics, Protestants, etc. So, I became quite disenfranchised with religion in general. How can one group of Christians be right and the rest wrong? So, I went to many different churches to see if they were alike. I was surprised that they were, they were absolute and the rest were wrong. That is my story of why I have been skeptical about religion until I found or rather the Konko faith found me. (Thanks to Teresa and the Uzunoe family).

At my Grandmother's funeral services we had a gravesite and a church service. At the gravesite service the preacher said to everyone if you don't have Jesus in your heart you can come up now and be saved. Personally, I was a little shocked, this was a service for the passing of a life, not a preoperational opportunity. Of course, nobody from the service went forward.

At the church service it was really nice lots of music and people sharing. Unfortunately, the preacher again started propagating. Mentioning that if you are not saved you will go to hell. It was not just once he mentioned during the service but three times. After the service one of the members came up to me and apologized for their preacher. They asked if I was offended because as a Christian she was. Personally, being in the Konko faith has helped me a great deal with my temper. I just thought towards the

preacher was to be tacky. But what the Konko religion teaches us to not to be upset, also to be respectful of other religions. That is why I have re-energized my faith recently with Kami and also to make me realized that I am happy being a Konko believer.

Another way that Kami has helped our family. My son needed braces and insurance would only cover half of the cost. Of course, we pray for our family including our children's health. One day at the airport I received a Divine arrangement quite literally. A customer who was an orthodontist wanted to learn how to fly. After flying with him on a couple of lessons, I asked if he could look at my son. Indeed, my son Daniel needed braces. So, we made an agreement that he would learn to fly for braces for my son. What a great blessing. I received a great divine arrangement for my family.

Thank you Kami Sama for all your help.

4/2010 Excerpt from March Sermon - F-14 "MIRACLE" by Rev. Lisa Uzunoe

... I believe the most common reason we feel we don't receive Kami's guidance, is that we missed Kami's message by not paying attention or being conscientious enough to receive them.

Many of us have certain "expectations" of how Kami will answer our prayers or guide us in our lives. If these expectations are not fulfilled, we perceive Kami's guidance as a parent or spouse nagging at us, someone criticizing us, or a mere "convenience" or "coincidence." To illustrate what one of these examples look like, let me share my story with you.

Last month, going shopping for the service offerings, I was at Fred Meyers with both my boys. When doing goyo (duties of the church) I believe it is important to have a calm and happy heart, so I usually pray before doing any, for everything to go smoothly.

On our way out of the store, the lady at the register who had been talking to my boys said, "Be careful not to lose your airplane!" Thanking her, I looked at the toy plane Genji had put on the back lip of the racing car shopping cart, and then exited the store.

Loading up and getting ready to pull out of the parking lot, Jubei suddenly says, "Where's my F-14 tomcat?" I say, "What do you mean, where is it?! It was right there on the cart. Didn't you load it?" I searched the car, the shopping bags, the cart, retraced my steps to the exit, nothing. Called the customer service from in the car, and left my name and number with lost and

found. Then drove around once just to make sure. Meanwhile, I was questioning my kids about what they could have done with it, lecturing them about how they are responsible for their toys, “the lady at the register even warned you about it.” Then, concluding there was nothing more I could do besides go back to the church, I announced that the only thing we could do was to look in each shopping bag again after we got back and wait for lost and found to call in a few days, but until then, it was good as gone. At which point, both boys burst into tears.

I’m thinking to myself, “My focus is suppose to be on Kami, - a calm HAPPY heart. Not this!” But in telling the boys we needed to apologize to Kami for missing Kami’s message from the lady at the register, I realized that message was actually for me, and then apologized to Kami and my boys for failing to recognize it before. Kami somehow knew what was going to happen, and gave me a heads up so that things WOULD go smoothly just like I had prayed.

Had I paid attention, it would have prevented all of this – the wasted time, the frustration, the tears, and the disharmony it caused. But I failed. So, I apologized.

I’m not sure exactly the chronology of all of this in my head, but as I stop for the stop sign right after pulling out of the parking lot, Jubei suddenly stops sobbing and says, “I put it in the cart!” “Honey, I already checked the cart, twice.” “No, no the other one next to it!” “What?!”

As thoughts of “why in the world would you do that!” Raced through my head, having already wasted too much time over it, sitting at the stop sign, I was deciding, go straight home or turn, straight or turn?

Driving back again once more, there was a man taking out two carts from the cart return. Pulling up and leaning out of the window, I could see the F-14 sitting there in the middle of his cart. Thank you Kami-sama. Happy ending!

The moral of the story is – don’t bring toys into the store. No, seriously now, they say hindsight is 20/20 and true, it’s great for learning lessons; but hindsight doesn’t help in the moment you need it.



So, when you pray, please make sure you pay attention to the messages, spoken or otherwise, given to you throughout the day. And remember that “After praying, NOT receiving blessings is miracle.” Thank you!

6/2010 Newsletter – Yosemite Lessons by Ben Vose

Robin & I met 15+ years ago in Cannon Beach. In 1999 we decided to move to Cannon Beach & Rev. Nobuharu Uzunoe with several members of the Portland Church helped us make the move, for which we were very grateful.



Only problem is that our winter weather seems to get fiercer every year. Robin grew up in southern California & so we've become "snow birds" for the last 3 years, heading south to try to escape some of the rainy windstorms.

This year we decided to do something special for our getaway. We've celebrated several "big" occasions in the past 3 years. We've celebrated our 12th anniversary and both of us have had our 70th birthdays. So, this year we decided to do something special. Robin worked in the "high country" of Yosemite, CA for three summers to help pay her way through college & loves it as one of her favorite places on earth. I've never seen it, so we decided to go there to celebrate our three big events.

Our twin grandsons who live in Hillsboro are now 5 ½ years old & we try to keep in touch with them with picture-emails whether we're at the coast or traveling in the "sun country." And here's how we shared this year's adventure with them:

Dear Reed & Noah,

WELL, we are back from California ... & we FINALLY got the pictures from our trip downloaded from both Gramma & Grandad's cameras. You should be VERY proud of your Gramma. She took more than 100 pictures, which is more than she's ever taken of one activity on her camera since she bought it. Now that we have the pictures all together, we plan to make a slide show for you on a DVD so you can share the whole trip w/us. In the mean time, here's a preview of the wonderful things we saw at Yosemite.

This was Grandad's 1st trip to Yosemite...But Gramma had worked in what they call the "high country" for three summers while she was going to college. We had a GREAT time riding all over Yosemite Valley.

Looking across lakes & broad streams at the waterfalls that fell from 1000+ feet above the floor of the valley. This is a picture of a VERY famous rock formation called "Half Dome" which Gramma climbed when she was in high school. One night we stayed in the



Ahwahnee Hotel & this is the view of another rock cliff named, "El Captain" which we could look up at while lying in our bed.



*Well, as I said, we took over 100 pictures & we hope to have the slideshow DVD made for you to see very soon. We'll bring it up with some gifts we brought home as soon as we can. 'Til then, be good boys & give Mommy & Daddy hugs for us. Bye for now!
Love, Gramma and Grandad*

That's the part we shared with the grandsons, but there was a "divine blessings" part that was one of those "good news, bad news" kind of things that really challenges one to "Grow in Faith!"

We'd stretched our budget to stay the one night at the Ahwahnee Hotel. But it was something special because as many times as Robin had been to Yosemite, she'd never stayed overnight in this famous hotel. Two weeks before the trip, we were shocked to read online that prices for the Ahwahnee had been cut in half for the night we intended to stay. So we called & sure enough, we got the discount. Turns out, there was construction road into the Ahwahnee that week and they'd lowered prices to keep the visitors happy. We were delighted and after a day's hiking & photographing, we checked in, had a great dinner with Robin's sister and brother-in-law and "turned-in" to read a little before going to sleep...that's the "Good News" part.

Now to the "Bad News" part. As I was reading... Low-&Behold... my nose started bleeding like the gulf oil spill! It became clear we ought to get medical help and Robin called the emergency clinic and they said to come right over. More "Good News," ... The Emergency Clinic was less than the Ahwahnee and the medical team that helped us was "top-notch!"

The best news was that in the process we learned I needed an adjustment in the medication I was taking, we got to spend the rest of the night and breakfast the next morning in one of the prettiest hotels you'll ever see... but best of all... Robin's sister & brother-in-law insisted we go back & stay at their home where I could recover by following the doctor's orders AND while we were there we got to be with the rest of the family at the hospital when Robin's first, great-grand-niece was born.

All in all seriously memorable celebration of life's high points AND challenges, which can all be blessings... when one lives by faith.

7/2010 Newsletter – Faith Story by Kurtis Inouye

This will be the 10th Anniversary since when my father died (Jerry Inouye) back in December of 2000.



Time goes by so fast and it just seems like yesterday when my father became ill of cancer. I remember he wanted us kids to sponsor just one Golf Tournament for his family and friends, so he could be remembered all the good times we shared – the camaraderie, laughter and good will. He would have been deeply honored that the Japanese Ancestral Society Sponsors a Golf Tournament every year and names it after him, (JAS Jerry Inouye Memorial Golf Tournament).

His love of golf was his passion in life besides his family and Konko faith, I guess that's why when he built his house in 1959 it was near three golf courses – Broadmoore, Colwood, and Rose City golf course. He even started a Miniature golf course called the Arnold Palmer Putting Course back in the late 60's. It may not have been financially successful, but it was one of the highlights and successes of his friends and family to gather.

Even though he loved to play golf he never would forget Kami sama. He would pray daily and go to Church frequently. His prayers were not just about having a good score and to win, but to compete, enjoy the day with friends and make sure nobody would get hurt in the process. I think that is why, I believe Kami sama never forgets who we are and watches over us like he did for my father.

Kami sama gave him his wish and allowed him to have his Annual Golf tournament every year. We even have our members from the Konko Church of Portland, twice a year to play golf, which Michie Sensei and others never played until now. My father's only wish was to have only one golf tournament, but look what Kami sama gave my father and for all of us to share. His love for golf and Kami brought all of us together and his legacy will never be forgotten.



8/2010 Newsletter – Faith Stories on behalf of Genji Uzunoe (4 yrs old)

[It is amazing and inspiring how pure the faith of a child is, and how they can show us Kami's workings. The following events are a few major ones that Genji has received just this summer and the teachings we felt they exemplified.]

***It is said a strong will can pass even through a rock.
Your single-heartedness can make any request come true.***

(Book of Teachings I Ogihara Sugi 17)

May – “Please Kami-sama, I want to play baseball on a team like nichan (big brother) and wear a uniform.” Cal Ripken was a new league in Portland but not yet the minimum five years old, Genji could only stand by and watch Jubei (7 yrs old) practice. A week or two in, after much praying and requests at the Mediation seat, the team was running drills indoors, so the coach invited Genji to join them. Putting forth 200% effort and all of his heart into keeping up with the 6-12 year olds, Genji kept getting invited back, and winning the respect and admiration of his coaches was awarded an official “ok” to play on the team and got his uniform.



(pants hemmed 6”)

June – The summer Academy baseball camp Jubei was invited to ran from 9am-3pm everyday. Because it was for more experienced 6-12 year olds and we couldn't afford to send two kids, Genji once again had to be a bystander.

Drying his tears, we told him he's good at hitting, but if he can practice his catching and pray to Kami-sama, then maybe by the end of the summer, he would be better and we would have some extra money to send him to one week of camp.

Continuing his efforts with determination, whenever Andy was able to help with coaching, Genji was there running as the ball/bat boy. Once again, he was invited by the lead coach and allowed to practice with the older kids. Though we did have him sit out a few days, Genji worked hard through the six hour days to keep up with older boys.

Four weeks later Genji came home beaming, “Okasan, I won FIVE hitting championships!!!” The hitting circle is where the coach pitches in the middle with all the players in a circle around him, quickly throwing three pitches to each, miss and you're eliminated. Genji outlasted not only Jubei, but with

the boys cheering “Genji! Genji!” he beat the 11-12 other players and even had a showdown with their best hitter - for five games that day. The coaches were astounded. “Thank you Kami-sama I won five championships!!” was Genji’s beaming Mediation that evening.

He showed us that single-heartedness in prayer with single-hearted effort behind it produces wondrous blessings making “any request come true.”

July – After the service last month, we were in the parking lot saying goodbye to believers. The last person had backed out and was about to pull forward to leave when Genji came running out the church door. After hesitating for a split-second as I yelled “STOP!”, he bolted across the front of the car. Thanking Kami repeatedly while thanking the believer for stopping, the believer in the car wondered why? What kid? He only stopped to pick up the handicap tag on his rear-view mirror which had “just fallen off.” ??? !!!
Going back into the church, we thanked Kami and our ancestors for their constant protection.

Practice faith with diligence, then major misfortunes will become minor ones. These minor misfortunes will in turn be cleared away. This is receiving the divine arrangement of Kami.

(Book of Teachings II Tsugawa Haruo 9-1, 2, 3)

August – On the way to the Sunday School camp out, we stopped for dinner at a restaurant in Newport. After we had finished and were ready to leave, Andy noticed and mentioned Genji was constantly itching his neck. Jubei had an allergic reaction to shellfish when he was two years old so we’d been careful to avoid shellfish for both kids. We’d ordered steak and fries, so why? Since I had ordered shrimp, suddenly I realized the fries may have been fried in the same oil as other seafood, and asking the management, that theory was confirmed. Advising that may be something they should put as a warning on their menu, I ran to the car. Gratefully, I had brought Benedryl “just in case someone needed it at camp.” And after one dose, Genji was fine.

Although we explained it and thanked Kami together, we don’t expect Genji to realize the full magnitude of the blessings he received in the last two months until he gets older.

However, for those of us practicing faith, let us realize how our daily practice turns major misfortunes into minor ones, and minor ones to be cleared away. Thank you very much for everyone’s prayers.

11/2010 Newsletter - Faith Story by Randy Akagi

When I was asked to write something about a faith experience I'd had, I originally drew a big blank on what to write about. Since then, after a serious traffic accident, it became a little clearer for me.

Until now, I always thought okage [blessings] were the blessings you received which made your life go smoothly. What I didn't fully understand was not only what it (blessings) allowed to happen or not, but what it arranged on a far larger scale for one small person.



Despite the level of damage to the vehicles involved, there were no fatalities. Some minor injuries and all the other details of insurance and replacement of vehicles went smoothly. I further began to think "What if (?)," as to the effect on families and friends of all involved if this wasn't so.

Life can change in an instant and this gave me more reason to appreciate the okage I've received.

10/2010 Newsletter Mini Sermon - Good Receiver by Rev. Michie Uzunoe

Our Founder taught us that if your receiver is not good, you will miss/leak out blessings and cannot receive Kami's blessings fully."

It has been over 30 years since my parent minister, Rev. Sue Kajiwara passed away and I don't remember when I started to send money every year to her home church to offer white orchids for her memorial day on August 27th. A white orchid perfectly represents her and her faith for me.

Three days ago, I received a letter from Rev. Naoye Honda, Tsurunominato church's head minister's wife (80 years old), who has also continued taking care of the church after Rev. Kajiwara passed away. She thanked me for my offering, saying it made her very happy and they offered a beautiful white orchid again for the memorial service as usual, but I was surprised when I read the next line. She said last year's orchid stayed in bloom until December, and not only this but early the next spring, 27 small buds came out and bloomed until late summer! She said this was because of my true heart offering. I cried. I want to say this great happening was because of Rev. Naoye's heart of strong appreciation, as Kami's heart. Because she was greeting and talking to the flower every day to take care of the flower. I replied to her, "Your virtue and good receiver has made great joy for me. Thank you very much."

So please practice faith to build a good receiver, don't leak blessings, and receive Kami's blessings fully!

12/2010 Newsletter – Faith Story by Lia Nagase

There are so many things about my faith that I'm tempted to write . . . but it really all comes down to the joy in my heart when I hear Mas, our 2¾-year-old son, pray. He reminds us to pray when we've forgotten before a meal. After our before-meal prayer, he says "thank you Kami!" in a really sweet and sincere voice. (Worth mentioning is how cute it is that it sounds a lot like "thank you Tommy" right now.) He prays for our sick family and friends. He says "thank you so much" to Kami for so many things. He's not perfect; none of the members of our family are perfect. But there is a sincere gratitude and appreciation that I see in both of our kids—Mas more consciously, as he is older than Shaifali, but it exists in both of them. This is what deepens my faith.



I walked into our church around two years ago now. I had always gotten so much out of church (Christian churches that I used to attend), but it was never a perfect fit, and certain negative events turned me off from trying to find another one. We were working with a health counselor for the months leading up to our finding the Konko church, and my husband, Finnegan, and I had written down that our spirituality was next to nothing and that we would like it to be better and deeper. As so many of you know, we walked by the church on a regular basis. I was always intrigued and didn't know exactly what it was. I called my dad to ask him what he knew. I finally took one of the Shining from Within booklets and read it, savoring each story, lesson, and piece of history.

Now, we feel renewed when we go to church. We feel supported and loved by all of the other members. We feel community. But, more than that, we feel gently guided to a better way of living. We strive to be forgiving . . . to be more generous, more loving, more patient, more appreciative. As I said, we're by no means perfect: life with two kids is hard—beautiful and hard. But we can find our center now. In times of sadness, desperation, glee, or change, we know that turning to Kami to share and to ask questions will help us. We are raising our kids to be appreciative and thankful and giving each and every day.

We are encouraging of each other and ourselves to become better people. We say "thank you so much" quite often and work to say it even more. When we hear Mas say, on a regular basis, "thank you so much, Kami, for ____" and list all the people he loves and who love him, it is downright heartwarming. We lead blessed lives.

1/2011 Newsletter – Faith Story by Karen Sunada

I grew up in three different religions. On my mom's side (Kuranishi) they believed in the Buddha. My dad (Inouye) was the Konko faith and I was a mixture of Christian, Buddha and Konko. As the years went by, I finally looked more into the Konko faith. I knew my dad was a strong believer. I remember he would pray to Kami sama 3 or more times a day and was very thankful for the many blessings he received.



My Konko faith has been weak compared to my dad's and to what it should be. I can say that I have faith but when it comes down to it, I am more like the girl on the beach...no muscle where the mouth is. I compare it to working out in the gym which strengthens my body. Learning the teachings of Kamisama builds me up to a better person spiritually and I'm enjoying this "spiritual workout".

Also Kamisama has allowed some things to happen in my life so that my faith is getting stronger.

Thank you Kamisama - I've found myself and it's a "good feeling".



2/2011 Newsletter – Faith Story by Robb Hunter

[Please welcome the newest member of our church, Robb Hunter from Port Glasgow, Scotland! Routed to the Portland Church through Brian Tambara's (Gardena Church member's) Konko website, from January 7th, Robb has absorbed every English material and teaching reference books I've been able to send him. He is excited and wishes to "meet" everyone.]

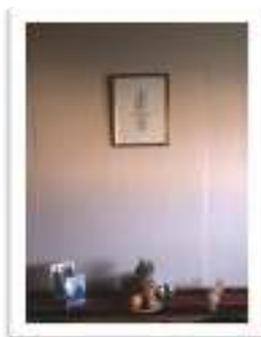


I guess I had always been looking for and believed in Konkokyo, without really knowing what it was called. I was brought up Christian, but never felt truly at ease with the faith; and always looked more to the religions of the East, such as Buddhism and Shinto.

Shinto primarily, as it is very similar to the Celtic Pagan tradition which was formally the main religion in my country before the onset of Christianity. Like Shinto, it too believed/s that spirit pervades everything, and things such as waterfalls, trees and the like are sacred and are home to many deities.

Upon finding out about Konkokyo, I was overjoyed, as it was by sheer accident that I came across the faith when looking at the so-called 'New Religions'. I knew as soon as I started reading about it, that it was the faith I had always been searching for. I thank Kami-Sama especially for that blessing.

My only wish was that there was a Church closer to me, however perhaps this is a way of making my faith firm due to my having to be a 'sole practitioner'; also, there are many things I have yet to learn about Konkokyo, but I am sure that if I am sincere Kami-Sama will bless me and help me along the path.



(Home Altar)

3/2011 Newsletter – Faith Story by Finnegan Hamill

I didn't grow up with much religion at all. My parents taught me to be respectful of all religions but to treat them individually with a skeptical eye.



Aside from a brief stint where I thought I wanted to be a Catholic and a few years where I participated in a youth group and hung out on the periphery of a Christian church, I've never spent much time trying to be part of any faith community. The price of admission --believing the story wholeheartedly--always seemed too high to me. My heart was closed.

The Konko faith and the community of the church did something I didn't expect: they opened my heart. Even though we've been church members for more than two years now, I still consider myself brand new to this faith. There's much I don't understand, much left to learn.

Still, I find myself throughout my day pulled time and time again back to *"hearts grateful and caring."*

The challenge to say "thank you so much" out loud, 1000 times a day resonated with me and, although I don't think I've ever reached that magic number, it's always in the back of my mind. My heart is more open to the wonder of the universe; more open to the divine guidance and blessings raining down around us; more open to seeking out kindness, forgiveness, connection, and joy in myself and in others.

For now, faith isn't about believing a story; it's about what's in my heart. No matter what hardships or blessings may come my way, that faith is a valuable thing.



4/2011 Newsletter – Blessing (not Blazing) a Trail by William Chin

What is a Blessing? We believe "all that is good" comes from God (Kami) in heaven and that he blesses us daily. Sometimes blessings are huge and easy to spot, sometimes so small we may be too busy to even notice them. Thankfully, whether we recognize those blessings or not they are there to protect us, teach us, encourage us, and help us grow to be whom we are. In retrospect, I would have viewed blessings as a little differently, especially in my youth years.



For example, in the midst of competitive basketball my senior year of high school, a hard foul from an opposing player sent me to the emergency room. I don't recall much from the incident; and just remember the ride to the hospital and first experience in with a CAT scan. Apparently, I went from mid-air to the landing in the wood bleachers, head-first. The prognosis was not as serious as it appeared; I had a severe concussion. The physician said I was extremely lucky; if my skull had struck the bleacher just a few inches toward Occipital part of my skull, the damage could have been a lot worse. At that time, I just thought that I was extremely lucky and hoped to get better so I could continue playing basketball. Now I look back and realize what a blessing that was that I only had a concussion. The question that I ask myself is why my change in perspective? Is it maturity (my wife thinks not)? My life experiences? One who is pragmatic would conclude it was a little of both.

The answer to my question probably relates the meaning of "Blazing a Trail". ...commonly referred to as a Trailblazer. According to www.Dictionary.Com, a Trailblazer is defined as the following: "a person who blazes a trail for others to follow through unsettled country or wilderness; pathfinder". By any means, I am not considering myself a trail blazer. Merely, I am comparing how blessings shape one's life and opportunities; i.e. *blaze a trail* for all of us.

Recently, life has been full of challenges. Between commuting weekly between Seattle and Portland for work, helping with both Fumio and Eiko Kuroye, missing my kids and wife, and getting ready to move, I have begun to wonder and doubt these blessings; it seemed like every time we were near the goal post, it was moved. In trying times, one turns to their faith. In my case, this is not that strong, since I still have more questions than answers in regards to the Konko Faith. In these trying times, I have seen how my wife Amy, handles all that is thrown at us with calm and ease. I realize that it may be not my "faith" that is helping us as much as Amy's. Her trust, belief and unwavering faith have been an inspiration to me; as well as a blessing.

In August 2010, Amy and I had a signed offer to buy a second home in North East Tacoma. The location was ideal; it was close to my work, near Amy's friends, and close to Madeline's Taekwondo. Everything was going smoothly, but both Amy and I were concerned about the impact this move would cause on both Fumio and Eiko; thus we decided it was best to wait one more year before making a move. I would be a liar if I were to tell you that this decision was easy. This decision was a difficult one, both emotionally and financially. At one point during this turbulent time, I was certain of giving up. I asked Amy, "Why is ALL this happening to us? Why can't life just be simple?" Her answer to me was "Because we can. Kami knows that we can handle it. Everything that happens shapes us. We can either choose to accept or give up. As life is an endless door of opportunities; when one door is closed another is opened. The question is, are you ready to go through that door and make the opportunity into a blessing and redefine who you are again".

For once, I felt like the sincerity, honesty, and delivery of this message was not only from a loving wife, but from God (Kami) himself. The message was of hope; delivered free of prejudice and judgment. As a believer, I honestly can only remember only a few times that I have felt this way after a mediation session. In trying times, I highly encourage everyone to seek mediation with those whom you trust and are comfortable. In the end, the decision we made turned out to be the correct decision. The blessing was that by not making the move, we had the opportunity to help fulfill Fumio's wish of caring for both of them.

As the *blessing* of our trail continues, we have restarted the process of house hunting in the Seattle area. In restarting this process, we have found that other challenges are presenting themselves due to the dismal and uncertain economic times. For example, a change in lending guidelines is not allowing the consideration of rental income toward the purchase of a second home. This has limited the number of available options for a desirable second home in preferred location(s). This year is a little different than last; we have more tools (i.e. blessings) in our toolbox. I am encouraged and optimistic that these blessings will continue *Blazing a Trail* for us. Whether this trail leads north to Seattle or elsewhere, my only hope is that wherever we are, we are able to be useful and help others in our unique and different ways.



7/2011 Newsletter – Faith Story by Nick Inouye

Hello, my full name is Nicolas Inouye, but I prefer to be called Nick. I'm 18 and I just graduated from Wilsonville High School. After a long college search process I have officially enrolled at the University of Oregon. I plan on pursuing business, and hopefully an MBA at graduate school. I think with the economic conditions, and the difficult job market, now it is important to have the graduate school experience for a job.



My father Kurtis Inouye and his father Jerry Inouye became businessmen as well, and it seems only fitting that I continue the legacy of business in our family. Don't worry; it is not a decision to maintain some sort of family legacy, just the same motivational genes for operating in the business market. But, there is still tradition as a Japanese American to maintain the family name as the last Inouye of the family line.

Luckily, there is no added pressure of being an Inouye, but there is more difficulty of being successful and finding a job. As I start to become a young adult, I am becoming more aware of the outside world—and with help through an economics class - the future that our generation will have to clean up.

With the increasing competition, younger people are experiencing stress at a younger age. No one likes stress, but sometimes it just happens when facing some new challenges. For example, college preparatory high schools now offer unique opportunities for college level courses with a rigorous curriculum. A 4.0 now is not good enough for Valedictorian. My final high school weighted GPA of 4.04 was not good enough for the top 15 percentile of my class.

Yet, Kami helped me overcome the late nights of studying and doing projects. Prayers out to Kami calmed my anxiety. Even with a difficult schedule as a senior, for the first time since freshman year, I finished both semesters with straight A's. He helped continue to relieve the stress by handing me a blessing: a full tuition scholarship to University of Oregon. All the years of hard work paid off. Without the support of Kami, I would have had a difficult decision in choosing a college for my future.

During difficult challenges it is important to pray to Kami for support. My last year of high school baseball could not have been better than the playoff push to the championship game. But the ride came with dramatic flair and nerve-pulsing situations. When I went to church to request prayers for a good game or a good season, it is not for a victory, but a nice clean game with good

sportsmanship. My dad always reminds me that grandpa prayed for sportsmanship because that was more important than winning. Kami listened to the prayers... After four years of high school baseball, in the games there have been no serious injuries, no fights, and none of our players have been ejected. After such a close loss in the championship game I still had respect for the other team's players.

Soon college begins and there will be plenty of challenges to overcome. College is a new test, where the pressure of maintaining good grades is elevated to the next level. There are plenty of opportunities for success and failure like high school, but like the importance of grades, the decisions could be more drastic.

My parents will not be at college to aid me, but Kami will always be listening to prayers for help and guidance. However difficult college could become, I need to approach it like a new step on the ladder of life. Each step higher is more dangerous than the last, but eventually the top will appear.

Right now the ground is close to my feet.

8/2011 Newsletter - Ganbatte Letter Effort @ Uwajimaya Natsu Matsuri

In efforts to help our shocked community and "turn worries into prayer," we found an aiyokakeyo way to help. Especially targeted children and families, to give people a way to help without having to make monetary donations. Partnering with Mercy Corps and Peace Winds Japan (who would distribute letters we collected to earthquake evacuated shelters in Japan) we set up booths at school and summer festivals. Yuukake Shinbun even provided us a full booth (with tent) at the Uwajimaya festival. The whole festival was a benefit for Japan Relief, and the Ganbatte letters were well received.

Fully staffed with four Sunday School kids, we had three stations where people had all the supplies to write/draw, learn to make or choose a premade origami animal, take/print/paste their picture onto their letter, and drop it into the "mail box" to send to the kids in Japan. Stationed next to the tanabata "wishes" tree, it conveniently provided a wonderful and colorful backdrop for the pictures.

We have sent a total of almost
200 letters to Japan! Thank YOU and
Great Job everyone!

(Daniel teaching a girl origami)



8/2011 Newsletter – Faith Story of Allison Akagi by Tomi Akagi

After graduating from college in 2009, my daughter Allison spread her wings and moved to Chicago to teach high school chemistry at an inner-city school through the Teach for America Program. Having lived in Oregon from birth to the age of 22, close to family and friends, that decision was a turning point in her life.



Chicago is a big city so different from Tigard and Portland, and it was exciting for Allison to go exploring—museums, parks, neighborhoods, restaurants and stores. However, with just five weeks of training, she walked into a school through a metal detector and started teaching. Students,

teachers, and security guards would often mistake her for a student. There weren't enough desks or books for students, there were fights in the hallways, copiers were often broken, and teaching tools were in short supply.

These were only some of her challenges, but through them, she grew stronger. She became more assertive, creative, understanding, patient, and more confident. She developed parenting and counseling skills, and learned how important it is to be consistent in her decisions.

There were rewards, too. She was pleased when students made the connection with what was being taught, and when they were engaged and asked questions. Allison felt especially happy when at the end of the school year, students thanked her for being strict because they came to understand that she was truly interested in teaching them. Especially gratifying was when one of her students proudly wrote her that he had earned a B in his college chemistry class.

Allison was a teacher but she was also a student, and the city of Chicago was her school. She learned to maneuver through an unfamiliar city; found roommates and apartments; dealt with the bone-chilling winds, snow and humid summers; faced cancelled flights home; and had to report an apartment break-in.

Through all her experiences, Kami-sama guided her. Even though she was in a strange city, Kami-sama saw to it that Allison was never really alone. She had

her faith in Kami-sama, and Kami-sama provided her with the Konko Church of Chicago. Even better, she already knew and was comfortable with the church family—the Takeuchis—who had lived in Portland for a few years before going to Chicago.

The Takeuchis offered her shelter when she didn't know when she would find an apartment. They stored her belongings in their basement, and helped move all her boxes into her fourth floor apartment (no elevator). There were always smiling faces at church, and they provided her with the support she needed.

Through Kami-sama's workings, Allison is now prepared to embark on a new adventure with confidence. She has pulled up stakes and moved to another new and unfamiliar location. Instead of a two-year commitment, she will be there for five to six years. She personally made all her moving arrangements, has an apartment, and will start a summer job soon. Although she isn't in Oregon, she is not as far away as Chicago; and she's living close to her grandmother, four aunts, four uncles, and six cousins—and the Konko Church of Gardena. She will no longer be a teacher of chemistry but a student of chemistry—her goal, a PhD in chemistry at Cal Tech.

Allison is very grateful to Kami-sama for preparing her for this next journey. No doubt, there will be challenges and many opportunities for growth, but she knows Kami-sama is always looking after her.

As her parent, I, too, appreciate Kami-sama for looking after my daughter and pointing her in the right direction in her life's journey.

10/2011 Newsletter – Faith Story by Louis Stansell

Dear Sensei and congregation of Konko Mission, just to update you all on what has transpired in my life the past year: I got married the 26th of June, last year, to a wonderful lady named Nancy Sims. She was married 42 years when her husband died. I met her about a year later at a dance, we went together for 3 1/2 years and she finally agreed to marry me. We have much in common and have had a wonderful life together, in which will last for many, many years.



She looks out for me in every way. Last September I started having double vision. The VA didn't do much for me, so my wife took me to a private doctor. Between a family doctor and eye doctors they determined that I had bad heart valves. I ended up having an heart operation the 11th of March...

The doctor replaced three valves, a maze procedure and Pacemaker. I have made a complete recovery from that operation. I exercise daily and do a lot of walking...The original problem with my eyes was corrected the 21st of June. I now have single vision and will stay with good vision.

I know that that the eye problem was a warning from god that something else was wrong. The heart surgeon told me that I shouldn't even be alive because my heart was beating only 20 times a minute.

I thank Konko sama every day for what he has done for me... Konko sama is in my daily life and guiding me through the rest of my life, I also thank him for giving me such a wonderful wife which looks out for my health and life.

Other than those happenings, my life has been normal and uneventful. I pray all is well with you all.

With great respect, Louis Stansell

I would be honored to have my story printed in your newsletter. I feel doubly blessed to be given a second chance at life and love of another woman. I thank Konko sama every day in my prayers. My prayers are with you all.

- Louis Stansell

11/2011 Newsletter – Faith Story by Paul Engler

[Introduced to us by Rev. Joanne Tolosa, Paul moved from San Francisco in 2010, is gifted in music, plays violin, and volunteered to direct the children's choir.]



Hello All! Recently, I've realized just how much I have to be thankful to Kami for. I've gotten a new job in the last couple of months, working at Portland Music Co. in the sheet music department. I really like my co-workers there and I get to apply tons of my already-existing musical knowledge, not to mention learn about musical literature I never knew existed. On top of that, I have renewed aspirations to go back to school for graduate courses for musical composition and conducting. Through it all, the Konko Church's Sunday School Choir has inspired me with their dedication to singing, and I am proud of them each time I hear them sing in church.

I recently caught a cold (but recovered from it quickly!); I have friends and family in the area who are always very supportive; and finally, I am thankful that I am able to be supportive of my friends and family, as well. For example: my dad recently was diagnosed with a case of Pleurisy. But he was able to have a doctor identify it as soon as he felt something was wrong, and treatment is underway. My sister (who lives near to me in Portland- our dad lives in Florida) and I have both contacted our dad and told him our concerns, of course, and we both pray for him, even though his condition is not too serious. I suppose the theme I am getting at here, is to count your blessings, and always look for the silver linings in every cloud, especially now in the Fall!

Let me talk about the cold that I caught, for a minute. It's been going around, and I suppose everybody catches the bug sooner or later. With the advice of some of my friends and family, though, I was able to recover from this cold in a relatively short time, I think (like 4 to 5 days). My sister, a grocery clerk at the place where I shop, and even a bank teller all told me things I should do, once I had let them know I was coming down with a cold.

I didn't realize it until after I had recovered, but Kami-sama was working through acquaintances- even ones I didn't know that well- to help guide me to better health. Reflecting on it after I got better, I thought, "maybe sometimes listening to the people around you can be just as good as Kami handing you a message." (I just wish I had thought that when I was still sick!) It's important to have faith and trust in Kami and other people when going through any kind of hardship.

Before parting, I wanted to relate something that I learned from Lisa-sensei at the Portland church: "Turn your worries into prayer. Then your heart will become calm and you will be able to receive divine blessings." - Later!

11/2014 Sermon – The Gift of Faith Rev. Lisa Uzunoe

(Visiting - Oregon Buddhist Temple Dharma School)



Good morning and welcome to the Konko Church! My name is Lisa, and as you can see, I'm a minister here.

I grew up in the church - my parents are ministers from Nagasaki, Japan, and immediately after getting married, they moved to the US. They trained in LA for one year and then were sent here to Portland, where my three sisters and I grew up. Did you see the school across the street when you came in? That was where I went to elementary school, then to Binnsmead, then to Marshall High School. What schools do you go to? Church? What do you like about your church?

I'm going to tell you a little story about myself. When I was growing up and going to school, by the time I got to middle school, I realized that classes were much harder for me than most other people. My parents didn't speak much English back then, they didn't know much about the American government, and even though we got the newspaper, we didn't read or talk about it much. So they could help me with some math, but the rest, I had to figure out for myself. Subjects such as English writing, social studies, and history were difficult for me as I didn't have any background or support in them. I had to work very hard to keep up, and somehow, managed to get mostly A's.

There was a time in 7th grade where all my friends made it to the honors English class. Only I was in a different class and when I asked why, my English teacher told me that I'd never make it in the other class as my English wasn't good enough. But I knew that in order to get into the Research Scholars English class in High School that prepares students for college, I had to be in the honors English class by 8th grade. Therefore, I asked to be placed there next year even though my English teacher and counselors said I would fail.

And I did fail. Over and over again! I have never gotten a D in my entire life! But for the first two terms, that's all I could manage to get in that honors 8th grade class with the legendary strict Mrs. Prentice.

If I got a D+, or a C-, I was so relieved! But because my teacher wrote very specific comments on what I did wrong, little by little I was able to

- 1) understand an author's message in the readings
- 2) organize my thoughts quickly (sometimes she would make us read an article at the beginning of class and turn in a 1-2 page essay by the end of that class-in 40 minutes! I was used to having at least a week for something like that!), and
- 3) I learned to write.

But all of this the hard way, trial and error, and error, and error!

It was a very difficult 8th grade for me, but by the end of the year, I was told I improved well enough that I'd be able to join the Research Scholars English class in High School. I was so happy! But this is why once in High School, I envied those students like my husband (then classmate), who so easily knew the answers or did well without any effort and barely studied at all! It was totally unfair. They just knew things that they didn't know they'd picked up from their parents who were often teachers or owners of businesses.

I felt they were SO lucky that their parents had given them such an advantage by passing on their education – something I was not as privileged to have. I was very envious of that even through college.

However, sometime last year while helping my own kids with homework, I was grateful that I was able to pass on what I learned to them. But then asked myself “what did *my* parents pass on to me? There had to be something...” and realized, my parents weren't able to teach me English or about the American society, **but what they did pass onto me, was faith.**

May I ask you, “do you know what faith is? what is faith?” ...

Different religions like Christianity, or Konko, or Buddhism, may practice faith differently, but faith itself is the same-faith is universal. Faith is:

to believe in something/a working greater than ourselves.

the ability to see the spiritual work that goes on which supports and guides us in our lives.

the understanding that we are here to help one another.

growing roots and being connected to the earth.

This is what my parents passed on to me, and I see your parents are passing on to you, or you would not be here. This is a priceless gift because it leads to a peaceful and content life-one in which you are not alone because you realize there are many people who support and pray for you.

You may not appreciate it so much yet at such a young age, but just remember- Knowledge, money, or power, cannot buy true happiness. Even the richest or most powerful people in the world are not always happy. But why wouldn't they be? Any guesses? ... Perhaps!

Many times it is because people can't find true happiness without appreciation, being humble, and being worry free.

I said I used to be jealous of those kids who had parents that taught them English and society, but no longer. I am very grateful that I had parents who taught me something far more valuable, taught me about faith – not through sermons or books, but in the way they raised us. To sum up what they taught, please read with me the Sunday school pledge and prayer that's in the very front and very back of the prayer books. We'll start with the very back.

Please read it with me:

Kami sama, please help me today, to do my best to be:

Respectful towards others, responsible in my actions, honest in my words,

Kind, considerate, and thankful in my heart,

And be a happy and helpful person to everyone and everything around me.

For this I promise and sincerely pray.

The very front of the book reads:

“I shall pray for others, Know that Kami sama loves me,

Give thanks for my life, and the blessings my family receives

each and every day.”

I’m sure you’ve heard the same kinds of words from your parents and teachers at school too—being respectful and considerate. But really try to put it into practice. Just like any sport. Who here plays a sport? What sport? ...Baseball, basketball, soccer, football. Tell me, can someone become a good or great player without practicing? No?

You practice and practice so it becomes automatic. So when it’s game-time, your body already knows what to do.

It’s the same thing in life. When something happens-really good or really bad, you don’t panic, you do what you’re supposed to do because you’ve been conditioned, and pray. And that’s where blessings come from.

I’d like to share a few faith stories:

We were supposed to buy a bike for our younger son Genji last year because he outgrew it, but he decided to get something else instead (pretty sure it was something Lego). But this year because his friends had gotten new mountain bikes with lots of really cool features (\$350 bikes), he asked his dad and together looked up bikes with the same kind of features online. They actually found one Genji liked a lot-neon green (which thankfully was more within our price range). It’s a tradition they have to go shopping during his “birthday lunch with dad” which wasn’t until the next week, but as it was only available in a store out in Tigard, and because something told Genji’s dad “go now, must hurry,” they immediately got in the car and went to the store, especially because when they called, the store said “sorry, we don’t do holds for bikes.” On the way there, they missed the freeway exit and had to go back from the next one, taking extra time. Sure enough, when they got to the bike section, there was a grandpa walking away with the neon green bike with his grandson. “Oh no, too late!” Genji and dad were very disappointed, but began to look around hopefully to find another bike he might like. Then, in the middle of all the other bikes, they found a neon green bike-the very same one! For some reason, it wasn’t registered in the store’s system.

They were able to buy it -the VERY last one. They went straight to the church and thanked Kami Sama for the blessings and being able to buy the bike he wanted, even after they thought it was gone.



There is something about the pure prayer of a child. Because here is another faith story.

We bought new shoes for our older son at the beginning of the school year because he had outgrown his old ones and I had a rewards coupon. At that time, Genji was looking around and found a pair of really cool neon yellow Under Armor shoes. But because his current shoes still had a few months left in them, I decided to wait because he grows fast, we were a little tight from paying off our Toronto Conference vacation, and I don't like to buy anything full price if I can help it. Although we knew the same shoes may not be there in a few months, Genji reluctantly agreed.

Two weeks ago, I told Genji maybe we can go look for shoes during that week. A few nights later (a Thursday), Genji suddenly asked if we could go now. I wasn't planning to until the weekend hoping my rewards coupon would come by then, but feeling a sense of urgency, I searched online for any coupon I could find, and printed one for 10% off "selected shoes" and we went. The neon yellow shoes were still there, and there was one box left in his size—the display model. My coupon would not work, but instead it was on clearance, 45% off! Again, we were able to buy the very last one.

We immediately took the shoes to the church to give thanks. While there I asked Genji "Again, you've been able to get what you wanted. The very last ones 2 times in a row. Why is that?"

He answered, "Because I do goyo?"

To this I replied, "Yes, because you work hard to help Kami Sama and do things for the church like cleaning and helping set up for services. But why else?" "Because I prayed for it?"



Yes. Very much YES!

Often times we forget to pray for things.

But this is the VERY reason for faith. Our Heavenly Father and Earthly Mother, the Spirit of the Universe loves us dearly—loves you dearly—and wants to give us everything (not necessarily everything we want), but everything we need, and is waiting for us to ask.

(And don't forget "Please"!)

Now that I'm an adult, and you may see this with your classmates, but I see so many people around me who have so much materially, but are unhappy or depressed, always angry, or are so stressed and worried about something all the time. I know I complain a lot, but I didn't know until people at work kept saying things like, "Why are you so happy and smiling all the time?" "You're always so peaceful and calm!" I'm not always that way, you can ask my family! But at work, I really try hard to help others and pray for them, and I guess they can feel it. It comes from practicing the teachings I learned from my parents and from church.

My father taught me, "Worries are a waste of time, they don't do anything for you. So turn your worries into prayer." Because praying is productive – they will result in good things for you, so use your energy for things that will be good in your life.

This is the gift of faith:

You are worry free – because you Pray and Trust that things will be provided.

You are stress free – because you receive guidance and protection.

You are burden free – because you are living not just by your own strength, but by the divine grace and strength of the Universe.

And without worry, stress, or burden

there is only room for happiness, thankfulness, and peacefulness left in your heart.

The gift of faith (the seeds) that your parents have given you will benefit you so much in your life. But YOU have to make it YOURS. You have to plant, water, and nurture them.

1. Pay attention to it- your faith, your beliefs, the teachings you learn from sensei at church or temple.
2. Learn and understand it.
3. Ask questions. Don't stop asking until you "really get it." Then,
4. Practice it. Practice it every day, every moment. Find ways to remind yourself.

The more you learn and the more you practice, the more grounded and stronger your faith, your roots will be connected to the Earth. And as you learn, you'll grow your own seeds that you can share, and be able to teach others who are searching for that very connection and peace of mind.

Teaching others is how we say thank you to the people who taught us. So be proud of and share your faith stories.

Thank you for attending today, and I pray you'll go home and thank your parents and senseis for the wonderful gift of faith they have passed on to you. Thank you!

2/2015 Newsletter - Sermon by Rev. Andrew Uzunoe

A few months ago I gave a sermon about a situation that really was affecting my life, and heart.

I talked about a “difficult co-worker” - a situation that I think we can all connect to. For those who don’t know, I work for UPS, the delivery company. Please allow me to share an excerpt now, and expand upon it.



....

A co-worker I had to work closely with, constantly lied to me, and often blamed any problem that he had, on my work. Everyday, it seemed this person would blame something or other on me, and I would end up in the office having to defend myself. Needless to say, our relationship went downhill. Since I was getting in trouble anyway, my effort in my work for him became my last priority. Since it takes two to tango (and I was a willing participant) the situation gradually got much worse, till this guy was actually intentionally sabotaging my work to make me look really bad, and to get me in trouble. We got into several heated arguments, with only a worsening relationship - to follow to show for my efforts.

It was about this time that I realized that faith is more than just praying, and contemplating, it is **living** the faith, TRUSTING in Kami, and if I was ever to be useful to Kami and help anyone, I must always be willing to take whatever instructions Kami gives me, change myself, and let Kami take care of the rest, since my control over the situation was really an illusion anyway.

So, I went in to work one day with a different attitude and a heart toward Kami. In the morning when this guy came in I asked him about his day, apologized for any problems he had, and blamed myself. I put his work as my first priority, and really LISTENED to what he was saying about his problems. Naturally he took great advantage of my new willingness to lay down, and I continued to get into trouble. But I had heard Kami's instructions to me and I would not alter my course.

Over time, things did start to change, he complained to me everyday, but instead of blaming me, it became more of a Mediation session more or less about the other people he encountered and the problems that they caused. This developed until he went from intentionally causing mistakes in his work area to blame on me, to covering up real mistakes that I made. He started teaching me about how he drives, and how to beat the system - tips and pointers to help me succeed in the future.

Then few weeks ago I was needed to go out on route and drive as a regular driver. As it turned out, it was the route right next to this guy. After the main morning meeting when everyone is supposed to be leaving, he came over to

me and without saying anything, took my board with all my addresses on it, went through it and drew me maps for the areas he knew were going to be difficult for someone who didn't know the area well.

This was quite a change, from trying to get someone fired by sabotage to wanting to help them without being asked. However, I had done none of it. Kami worked though me to make a change in someone else's life. Kami washed my face for me, something I could not do on my own, and completely changed a bad situation into a good one.

.....

Now someone came back to me with questions about the *how* of what happened, asking, "How did you get to the point that you got to trust in whatever Kami gave you?"

That really made me think about how I was able to reach this concept of "trust in Kami" in my faith, and what that *cliché* really means to me comes to three main ideas:

1. Give up my ego
2. Evaluation of myself, and
3. Patience and observation (wait and see)

The first idea may be the hardest of them all. My ego, or arrogance is my thinking that I know what is best for me and my future. The belief that I know where the path I am on ends. Yet if this were true then I would never have any problems in my life!

Many, if not most of my hardships came from my "go it alone" policy, or do what I want regardless of the messages from Kami, or others that caution those actions. I have learned that no matter how much I know or understand things, when I try to lead my life, things inevitably go wrong. When I asked Kami to lead me, and carefully tried to learn Kami's answer and then follow without fail, amazing and often unbelievable things kept happening to me.

So now when I follow where Kami leads, I can often see changes coming ahead of time and which way to go. Many of these experiences led to my beginning to trust my future to Kami, even if it is one I can not see coming.

The second idea - to evaluate myself constantly to see where my heart is. If divine blessings begin with a heart of Kami as the Tenchi Kakitsuke says, then it is imperative to my faith to see my hearts' direction as often as I can.

Being human, my heart is often all over the map - some days good, some days... need more work. And not just days, sometimes it is hour to hour or even an event sends me miles down the wrong path from where I just was and want to be. So daily evaluation is learning to see yourself from outside, to be able to observe the problems around you and help you see what part of the problem you play.

As a result I have found that this is what I use morning and evening gokinen for. In the morning I set up my day, pray for things coming up, see possible weak points, try to find trigger points that will set me off in situations that I will deal with today, and find ways to keep my heart in Kami even in those difficult times. I ask Kami to help me through them, and to teach me how to be better.

Evening Gokinen is the opposite. I give thanks for the learning experience of the day, and evaluate how I did on my goals, where I broke down and my heart changed, and how to overcome those situations in the future. I envision myself reacting in a much better way, of how I would like to have responded to problems that arose, and apologize to Kami for my shortcomings.

The third idea takes a lot of hard practice. Patience is not a value that society holds in high regard. In fact, corporations, and commercialism push on us the ideal, "you must have it now" or your life will be over! Yet this often is not how faith, and blessings work. Changes in our lives or in people are often slow, small, and take time to accumulate like the sand in an hourglass.

If we pray, or in the example, change our thinking and ways of doing things, results are not always immediately evident. But do not give up. With Kami there will always be a solution, no matter what, and if we don't see them, then perhaps we are not looking hard enough, or waiting long enough. Observation of our situation, and understanding to look at all things happening in our lives is necessary to see solutions forming through the workings of Kami. The solution or answer may not be what we think it will be or ought to be. The person who asked me these questions also stated, "God answers all prayers, but sometimes the answer is no," to which I respond, I believe that from Kami the answer is never "no" but sometimes an alternate solution we do not see.

An example would be my son Jubei asking me if he can have a candy bar before bed. Not such a good idea, for there will then be no going to bed, only a hyperactive kid full of sugar who can't sit still. Yet I don't tell him, "no", I

redirect his request to when it will be a better idea. I will say, “how about tomorrow afternoon after school when you have completed all of your homework?” I gave him a time, and a goal to reach so that he may have what he desires, yet at a much better time in the day for his body.

From Kami, there will always be an answer, and blessings. The Founder promised this much, in fact saying, that the real miracle would be if you asked yet did not receive blessings from Kami upon request.

What I have found is that often what we judge the outcome to be of our request is not always the answer given to us. If we are not watching for any answer we often miss the message and blessing to us, therefore it appears that we did not receive any blessings, when in actuality, we just missed them.

So observation is essential in gaining this “trust in Kami”, and staying the course though patience to be able to see our solution come into fruition.

When I put these three things together, I let go of where I think it will go, observe Kami’s workings while watching my heart to stay in the positive, and wait for changes that will certainly occur. What we find in this example is that through conscientiously trying to practice faith and directing my heart to Kami, I changed, which then created change in others with the help of Kami, leading me out of a hopeless situation that I had gotten myself in through my own ego.

The Founder has left us guidelines of how we can change our lives though faith and trust in Kami, and if we follow and don’t give up, we can change not only ourselves to who we want to be, but be allowed to help Kami change others.

Thank you.

2015 Newsletter – Faith is Timing and Exactitude by Rev. Andrew

...this year [my son] Jubei has moved up to Babe Ruth level. Age 13 is a major deadline [milestone] in baseball, where you go away from Little League diamonds to the Pro diamonds...Because of that, all the bats change, the gloves change, all these things are expensive.

This year Jubei's entering the new era, and especially as a catcher, these kids stop throwing 50's and now is throwing 70's and 80 miles an hour. That's some pretty good velocity, and his old catcher's mitt which was soft leather, wasn't able to do it; his hand would come back swollen and shaking after being pitched. So, we needed new equipment but catcher's mitts are ridiculously expensive and very hard to break in. So, I had prayed about it and planned early about what we were going to do. Christmas came and went, and he didn't get a mitt, wasn't sure how this was going to happen. So, we prayed for it. Stayed calm did gokinen and waited for Kami sama's answer. Because the Founder promised, when you pray single-heartedly, and you have that calm heart to hear the answer, Kami sama promised there will be an answer, we just have to wait and see. And nothing happened immediately, so we started practice and he kept using that glove.

I periodically have a good time playing on ebay, especially baseball stuff. When you know an industry very well, you can find good deals and resell it. But catcher's mitts are really hard - they are a whole lot of them but most are really torn up old mitts, or brand new mitts that they're selling for \$20 less online. But anyway, I haven't checked in a while but was praying about it and Lisa sensei came to me one day and asked about Jubei's hand hurting. I said, "well, nothing has come along." She asked, "have you checked online today?" "Well no, not really. There hasn't been anything for quite some time." "Well you should go check on line or I'm just going to go buy one."

Now Lisa sensei is very good at finding solutions. She's going to get a mitt. But she often gets the first mitt she comes across. And I'm really picky about my gloves, the kind of glove I would like to get, and one I think is the best for Jubei. So, I thought I better get on this, and so I checked once again on ebay that day.

Just as I logged on, a new one came up - a college athlete who was no longer catching and had a glove he had played 20 games with and was selling. It's chancy buying stuff, I've been burned a couple times by gloves that were actually torn up, they try to hide it in pictures. And it actually it was a good price. But usually you'd see that you can't buy it - it's a two week bid and you have to be the last one to bid at the last second or you're not going to get it. But he had this as a buyout. But still wasn't sure...it wasn't quite the glove that Jubei wanted or I wanted but it was close, and by the same company. So

long story short, I asked if him if he thought this would be ok and he said yes. So I asked Kami sama, is this what you want us to do? Why would this come up at this time. Lisa sensei, why would she say that if not for me to come here. And why would this happen, right as I logged in, they posted, if this wasn't meant to be? And so I decided to buy it.

Then even after Kami sama starts presenting stuff to us, it's important that that's not the end. As it happens, you continue to pray, "is this the right way?" At the end, you continue to pray until it's completely done. We learned in KIC [Konkokyo International Center] writing the guidebook how quick that was. Every time it looked like the project was done, all they had to do was print and ship it, it was fine and we said, "oh thank you for these blessings" thought it was done. Then they printed purple trees – it wasn't done. And then they didn't ship it, and there were all these problems. And then really, until the VERY end, keep praying to Kami sama. So I asked Kami sama what to do. Now, telling that story I need to tell this one.

Jubei was able to get a job at school. For some reason, to teach kids money or the fair trade system that people are complaining about, he works in the cafeteria and they pay him about a dollar a day. He goes early and serves everyone their lunch; been doing this all year. I basically told him I was saving up this money for his baseball because there are travel tournaments and all that stuff gets spendy. So after I bought this mitt, I said we're going to have to use your money, at least some of it to pay for this mitt. He said, "ok that's fine", and we got out his money and counted it. It was exactly the same amount for the mitt plus shipping. Seriously, it was exactly how much he had in that pile that he had collected all year.

Things like that, that's the timing of Kami sama. That's divine blessing. The way everything falls into place.

I ordered it, wasn't sure it as was a black mitt, you can't really see if it's been over oiled or anything. When the mitt arrived, it was actually not even broken in yet. It's pretty close so you can squeeze it, but not so broken in that it already has someone else's hand imprint in it. It couldn't be more perfect. The mitt's perfect, the price is perfect, the timing was perfect.

That's how you see Kami sama's divine blessings. But if we're not patient, and we get impatient, and not wait for Kami sama to show us the way, we won't see.

If we keep asking all the way through this, and we receive blessing after blessing, that's divine arrangement. That's Kami sama working in our lives.

6/2015 Happiness is a Choice – June Sermon by Rev. Lisa Uzunoe

...I would like to share something I heard recently – the phrase “Happiness is a choice. You can choose to be happy.”

How many of you believe this to be true, that (traumatic incidents aside) you can choose to be happy each day?

I ask because most days I’d say I’m happy, but lately I’ve found myself frustrated and complaining more often than not. It’s been challenging getting kids up and ready for school on time, mostly because of the late nights with homework (which have been exhausting my patience to finish), end of the year projects (Genji’s bridge project broke –bamboo snapped and exploded the rest before he could turn it in, Jubei forgot his poster visual for his presentation at Genji’s school in the morning – he said it was because the bus came early, but didn’t tell us until bedtime), and baseball games that start at 7:30pm – Andy didn’t come back with Jubei until 10:30pm from a Tualatin game earlier this week because they went to 10 innings. I didn’t go to that one because I was working with Genji on his presentation, but did have to have a second dinner ready for Jubei because they’re always hungry after a game. A wee bit overwhelmed these past few weeks, in trying to work on my FTI (Faith Training Institute) class called “Our Relationship with Kami,” I’ve been drawing a blank. Being so edgy, I just haven’t been able to feel a connection to Kami.

However, when I heard, “You can choose to be happy,” at first I thought “yeah, right, it’s just that easy!” But then it reminded me of the Divine Reminder “Divine favor depends upon one’s own heart,” and another teaching that says, “You can save or destroy yourself with your own heart.” It made me stop and think, “If I can choose to be happy, then let’s choose it! Need to save myself with my own heart...So start by figuring out why I get so frustrated and upset.” My stress and frustration came from “this didn’t happen” or “that didn’t get done.” I found my complaints came from when things weren’t going or happening the way I felt they should or the way I wanted them to.

Andy sensei is always talking about our expectations being human-centered. When I realized this, I knew I had to center my heart back to Kami. Not knowing how to go about it, I plopped myself down at the Mediation Seat at church and laid it all out to Konko Sama, apologizing, then ending with saying “I really don’t know what to do or how I can better manage all of this, all the little things that seem to have gone wrong.”

And as I sat there, upon reflection, I realized the homework and projects did get finished with full credit. I sent in a picture of Genji’s bridge that I took

right after we finished it. Jubei was able to retrieve his poster the next morning – I had him pray and then made sure he thanked Kami sama it was still there instead of in the garbage somewhere. And baseball – as much as I complain about having to go and taking up so much time, I love being out in the evenings in beautiful tree shaded parks cheering on our teams with the parents.



With each realization, I became more and more grateful, slowly moving my heart from self-centered, back to Kami-centered. I also began seeing things that were more important, the basic things I wasn't being grateful for: the health of my family and our church members, being able to afford a house and food for my growing kids, even our forever growing pile of laundry. I remember Rodney sensei in San Francisco once talking about how he was taught that instead of complaining about having to do laundry, we should realize and be grateful that it means we have ample clothing to wear (which isn't the case with many people in many other countries.)

Going back to appreciate the most basic of blessings – just being alive and healthy – I can let go of my agenda, my excess greed and self-centeredness, and truly trust Kami. In the process of apologizing for not appreciating these basic things and also not seeing the blessings I had been receiving, my complaints and frustrations melted away. By the time I closed up the church, my heart was beginning to fill with gratitude, and my underlying edginess was finally gone. I felt for the first time in a long time, I was genuinely happy!

It showed too, because the past several weeks, people at work haven't really stopped by my desk – usually they do. I know there were times when I'd be fuming about something, but stopped and apologized to Kami because I was creating negative energy in the space Kami had given me to help people. The very next day after "choosing to be happy," **two** co-workers came up to me at different times – one telling me how it was so peaceful here, and another thanking and giving me a gift for the support I had been giving her through a tough time. It was like Kami was telling me, "You're back on line!"

My take away from this is, people notice when you're happy. People like happy people and positive energy. As a Konko believer, this is the heart we should be naturally projecting. "You can choose to be happy" doesn't mean you just flip the switch in your brain from "moody" to "happy," but you consciously make an effort to stay Kami-centered – to appreciate the most basic blessings, and be mindful of our reactions to events in our lives and how they affect us and everyone around us.

Once more, "Happiness is a choice. You can choose to be happy." So please choose to be happy today, and Kami sama will show you the way. Thank you!

SENIOR APPRECIATION

We took our seniors out to lunch and presented them with potted plants and our words of appreciation gathered from the members.

Ben Soejima entered the faith when he married Nobuko Francis Moriyasu 59 years ago. It was the Moriyasu family who asked and supported Bunjiro Hirayama to come to Portland from Tacoma, become a minister and to establish the Portland Church. Ben and Francis have long continued to support the Portland Church. What we would like to thank Ben & Francis for:

- ✚ I remember going with my dad to your barbershop. Both of you would talk and laugh. You always wanted to make sure I was OK though. You are a caring person. Thank you for all the laughter and joy and the many fond memories.
- ✚ Ben always smiles and is positive in his outlook on life. He lives his faith with kindness. Thank you, Ben, for being a role model for all of us.
- ✚ Nobuko san taught the koto to many people in the NW and is why we are able to continue the kibi music & dance here in Portland. Thank you for your guidance & preserving a rich tradition.
- ✚ During any big church event, Ben and Francis always brought snacks for everyone to enjoy, but also they would always bring a main dish (usually KFC or chowmein) specifically for the minister's family to have for dinner. This is because they understood that even after the event was over and everyone helped with the initial clean up, there was always more ministers had to do. This really helped our family, especially our mother. Thank you so much for your thoughtfulness behind the scenes.

Shizu Akagi entered the faith when she married the late Mr. Minoru Akagi over 60 years ago. Her mother-in-law, Mrs. Hisayo Akagi was also one of the founding believers who greatly supported Rev. Hirayama and the Church in the beginning, and especially the five years after his passing before a succeeding minister was found. Shizu has been a core believer for this church.

- ✚ You always have a warm glowing smile when I see you. Thank you so much for your kindness.
- ✚ I appreciate her for the way she was always there to help the church and my mother, especially for Saturday morning mochi, as it greatly helped ease the many duties Michie sensei had. Shizu is so hard working, it made me work harder to keep up.
- ✚ Our church grandma, Shizu always put others before herself. Serving other believers, and then the ministers, she would always be one of the

last ones to have a turn or eat. Thank you for showing and teaching us what "selfless service" truly means.

- ✚ Besides being the very best mother-in-law, Shizu-san (I call her Grandma) is a kind and thoughtful person. Her faith is simple and sincere. She gives and expects nothing in return. Thank you for all you've done for the church and our family.

Yin Yuk & Thomas Chin

Parents of William Chin who also attend church services and events through the invitation of their son and family.

- ✚ Thank you for being such wonderful people. Not only do you bring a beautiful culture and language into your grandchildren's lives, but you constantly teach them the proper way of doing things and right from wrong. This reinforces the words of their parents and forms a solid "good example" that will remain forever ingrained in their lives.
- ✚ We just wanted to say "Thank You" to ALL our Seniors today for all you have done, unconditionally for ALL of us here today. Happy Senior Appreciation & Happy Grandparents Day!

Yasuko & Frank Sr Sunada began attending the church when their son's family became more involved and invited them to come to services and events. What we would like to thank Yasuko and Frank Sr for:

- ✚ Thank you for being such a wonderful mother and father-in-law. I want you to know how much I appreciate all the love and support you have given me over the years. How lucky I am to be part of this family.
- ✚ Whenever I greeted Frank Sr. with "Good morning, how are you?" He would always say with a childish grin on his face, "I'm good. I'm good until I'm dead!" This always reminded me to stay young at heart, and to have a strong will to be healthy.
- ✚ Frank Sr is such a good solid man, honest and hard working. We don't know too much about Yasuko because she is so quiet, but behind every great man is a great woman. So thank you Yasuko for being a great woman, calm and supportive and quietly strong.

Josephine & Lee Davis

Parents of Rev. Andrew Uzunoe. Josephine was visiting. We thank them for:

- ✚ Thank you for being such a warm and faithful person. Listening to the list of things and people she prays for, sometimes it makes me feel inadequate as a minister and makes me realize how much more praying I really could be doing no matter how busy life gets. I am so grateful to have such a wise yet "cool" mother-in-law. You hear so many stories about the terrible relationships with the "mother-in-laws," but every

time I go to visit, we talk forever. So much that we have to be careful not to talk past 2am so she can get up in time to make breakfast for her grandchildren, while she whispers to them to "let mom sleep."

- ✚ Thank you Lee for your wise counsel. Children are "always children" for most parents even after we've grown. However, you have always treated us as equals as soon as we turned 18. This has helped us to act as adults and be more responsible earlier on.
- ✚ Thank you grandmama for making meals with desserts. Also, for always having my favorite snacks ready for me.
- ✚ She gave me a heart rock, and a big box of pretty rocks. She gives me hugs, granddaddy gives me BIG hugs, and I love them.

(Unable to attend, but very much appreciated!)

Eiko Kuroye:

- ✚ I appreciated seeing you at church. You made me feel welcomed. I miss you.
- ✚ Eiko always had a little sweetie or something for the kids. She's always been one of those ladies who make church feel warm and welcome. Even now, in her nursing home, she is loved by the staff and for many, is their "favorite grandma."

Reiko Bingo:

- ✚ Even with Dementia, the last time we took her to church, she said, "Oh, I haven't come here in a while have I? Konkosama arigato gozaimasu..." and put her hands together. You have always prayed for the safety and protection of the church and members, thank you.

Mark & Lilly Namba:

- ✚ No matter how many years it has been, you continue to show your appreciation to Rev. N. Uzunoe for his help in your time of need by offering boxes of Hood River apples to the church each year. Thank you for showing us what true appreciation and eternal gratitude is.

Jerry & Grace

- ✚ My mom and dad have passed away but the memory of them lives in my heart. Remember to show your love & appreciation to your parents as often as possible. They are one of the greatest treasures of life.

Thank you to All our Seniors. You have set the foundation and pillars to allow the next generation to blossom and grow. You are the glue for our families and community, showing strength, courage, and experience when we are lacking. May we cherish and carry on your wisdom and kindness.

3/2011 Newsletter - Mitama Spirit Propagation sermon by Rev. Lisa Uzunoe

...The Autumn Memorial Service or Goreisai, is held to honor, remember, and appreciate those who have passed on before us, because it is **they** who have given us what we have today. People who have passed on before us, loved ones, and ancestors. Who are these people exactly? Who are you honoring today and what did they do for you?

If **we** don't remember or pass on their stories, faith, and legacies, **they** all fade into nothing. And **WE** don't appreciate what we have or where we came from – we end up thinking we did it all on our own, when we're actually "standing on the shoulders of giants."

Thus, these services are not only to remember, but to pass on the memories, faith, and virtue of the mitama spirits.

They can continue to inspire us, encourage us, and give us strength – IF we remember their examples of how they lived their faith or overcame their problems. Otherwise, this is just another service. We SAY we honor and appreciate our mitama, but has little meaning if we don't really stop to think what it is exactly we are appreciating. So take the time to think about it.

Does anyone know about Hirayama Sensei and his family, who are they, what did they do? What are we thanking them for, if anything?

There hasn't been very much information on Hirayama Sensei as he had passed away five years before Revs. Nobuharu and Michie Sensei came. How can thank them if we don't really know what they did? How can we be inspired if we don't know their struggles and how they overcame them through faith? This is why, for Hirayama Sensei's 50th Memorial Anniversary, we decided to publish a biography to honor his family and their efforts. For without a book to document the Hirayama Family's legacy and a large part of the beginnings of the Konko Faith in America would disappear, and with it, the faith, virtue, and inspiration that would have helped us and others in our lives.

Therefore, the past six months we've been researching, requesting for help from various people, and praying to the mitama for guidance. The results have been incredible. We only knew a few things before – that the Hirayama family helped people, started gatherings, inspired others to become ministers, became ministers themselves, and taught koto and kibimai. But now, we have proof, and how they did it.

I truly felt the work of so many mitama spirits with each new piece of information that came in. We now have ship passenger lists of when they emigrated, photos of Tacoma gatherings, articles Hirayama Sensei submitted to the Konko newspaper as early as 1920, first hand accounts from Otsubo sensei – the first immigrant minister in North America – and how Hirayama Sensei opened his heart to the faith. Internment camp photos and death certificates, letters to Hirayama Sensei from members returning home from the camps in 1945, mitama records from Fukuoka Church (which we just got last week). Also a week or so ago when I was working on the Moriyasu page in the biography, I happened to receive from one of Ben San’s daughters, a picture of the Moriyasu house (the one that caught fire), as well as an identical picture I had (but even Michie Sensei didn’t know the people in them) only reason I used it was because it was the latest picture we had of Hirayama Sensei.

Turned out it was the Moriyasu family with “grandma Moriyasu” (Tora Moriyasu), who was the one who invited Hirayama Sensei to Portland. I was sad before that we had pictures of him with other members, but didn’t have a picture of him with the founding Moriyasu family together—and now, here it was. (Actually we had it, we just didn’t know it because we only knew of younger pictures of Tora-san so didn’t know what she looked like as an elder!) Thank you Moriyasu mitama!

I was having difficulty gaining permission for photos from the KCNA book, which was frustrating and sad at the same time. But kept praying to Hirayama Sensei and church mitamas for help. While cleaning the closet, found a box of original photos saved from the shed leak. Many were damaged, but still somewhat ok. Few were great. Thank you Hirayama mitama!

Then, Tomi brought the Akagi photo album which had many of the ones that we really wanted. A few were perfect photos of the same ones I needed that were damaged. Funny because she said, “I always thought, why did WE end up with this? But, maybe it was for this project.” Thank you Akagi mitama!!

Early on, Tomi brought us her copy of the church by-laws, which I’d never seen before. It was prepared and signed by people we’ve never heard of, but Michie Sensei believes they were the Inouye family contacts, as Sugao Inouye and family have always been the legal and financial backing for the church. Thank you Inouye mitama!

Soon, we'll have a biography that documents the reason we have this church today. Thank you everyone for your help and prayers in all of this.

The Goreisai Memorial Services are fun, we make lots of great food, remember funny stories of our mitama. How Jerry-san would leave church on Sunday to go golfing, or how Shizu-san would leave corn starch hand prints on Allison's back, or how Fumio-san loved hot dogs so much that he'd eat them straight out of the freezer-yes, frozen!

But don't forget to share the faith side of these stories. Of how Jerry-san put church first. He would always come to church or go to the gravesite the day before on Saturday, to seek mediation or mow more than his portion of the lawn for the cemetery clean up he'd be missing.

Don't forget to tell how Shizu-san came every morning for the 5am service (yes, morning services used to be very early!). She would also come every Saturday to help Michie Sensei with making mochi, and the days before to make and roll the anko into balls. She was there for every event in the background to help prepare, execute, and clean up. Yet she never complained or took credit – always hard working, but so humble.

Don't forget to tell how Fumio-san believed in Kami-sama and goshinmai so thoroughly, that he taped a goshinmai to his heater when it started acting up. Did it work? Yes! But not in the way we might think it would. His heater stopped working-on and off, but every time it acted up and he called the repair man, when he came, it would work so he'd say it was fine – nothing to fix.

Anyone ever had a similar situation? This actually happens a lot for all kinds of health problems. Every time you go to the doctor, the symptoms are gone so they say, "everything is fine!") Yeah, finally a frustrated Fumio-san prayed and **taped** a goshinmai to his heater. The next time he called the repair man, it was acting up so he was able to figure out what was wrong with it. So Fumio-san always said the Goshinmai fixed his heater!

Stories like these show us how to apply faith in our lives. They remind us what to do when things aren't going well, so we don't waste time and energy worrying or being frustrated, but put them towards praying, which turns our hearts and minds to Kami Sama. And when we do, Kami Sama arranges everything.

There are so many stories to tell:

The Moriyasu house fire story. They're the family that asked Hirayama Sensei to come to Portland. On the underside of one of their altar drawers, is a message written by Tora Moriyasu which tells how their house caught fire, was put out by firemen, but while Mr. Moriyasu went to church to give thanks, it caught fire again. (I think most of us at this point would be complaining!) But instead of being upset or doubting Kami Sama, she said that it was Kami Sama burning out all the bad things/energy from the house, making sure it was all gone. So from then on, only good things will come to their family. She was so grateful, she wrote this message to her two daughters so their family will not forget this great blessing.

Fumio and Eiko Kuryoe, didn't just always have keychains and candy to give to everyone they met, but they came to worship every single day to church. They only had social security as a fixed income, but still offered \$1 every day. They were grateful to be able to have the health and energy to come to church each day, and to see people. Such a simple but joyful way to live!

Reiko Bingo, Ishibashi Sensei, or Hi-bachan. Might remember her as the great-grandma that ate my mochi! Or that you had to keep an eye on because she would wander off the property. But she watched and raised three Uzunoe girls (Amy, Lisa, Teresa) as well as tended to the church, especially during the years while Revs. Nobuharu & Michie Uzunoe worked three jobs. Every day she made the same prayer - for Ikigami Konko Daijin's virtue to be manifested through this church's Mediation seat, for safety of the church and its members from disasters – and she would name every-single-one (fire, flood, earthquake, accidents, injuries, and many more). I remember having to write them down when I first became a minister. Taihen [So much work]! Thought of it as kind of a chore at first, but realized it was such a sincere prayer EVERY time, EVERY day. It helped me understand how to pray better.

[She received such virtue that her entire family had a part to play in her funeral service, including being officiated by three minister grandchildren.

“I am grateful to Kami Sama I was able to send her off with my hand made kimono under her service gown”– Michie.]



Ben Soejima. We've watched him take care of his wife Nobuko-san, so lovingly for 10-20 years? Her having Parkinson's was difficult, but he never complained, never blamed her, and was so happy to care for her.

All of our beloved members had problems, they had life and finances they had to balance, they had health issues and pain – all the same problems we have today. But that's not what they focused on. They lived for other people. They lived because they loved life and each other. They didn't skip a day because they were tired. They didn't make excuses and skip their duties – whether for work, home, or church. They didn't give up when things got hard or blamed others – they found ways to keep their priorities straight, were confident in what they believed in, and prayed for the rest.

There are so many stories to tell. So many people and examples that can inspire us to try harder, not give up, and come to trust Kami and our faith more strongly. But that would take weeks to tell. Which is why we're publishing Rev. Hiramama's biography. Which is why we'll be publishing a book for our 90th Anniversary (which is now only a year and 7 months away).

Because these stories need to be shared and handed down, so we can truly honor and give tribute to those who made it possible for US to receive blessings today.

Do not to forget the foundation of your faith,
Do take good care of your roots,
and they will help you flourish.

Thank you for taking the time to come and show your appreciation today.



2013 - Double Rainbow Reassurance. After returning from a London Faith Gathering trip requested by the Konkokyo International Center, greatly inspired by the passionate believers but also concerned about them not having a church, Lisa Sensei faced NE from the Portland Church towards London to pray for them. When she lifted her head, a super vivid rainbow appeared in the direction she was facing behind the church house.



Looking closely, there was a second rainbow behind it. She felt Kami Sama saying, "Don't worry, you're well taken care of."

Running out past the house to get a better photo, this is what was captured that blessed day.

Major Blessings Received by the Church

2010 Apr – Changing of the Guard. Ever since Andy Sensei's divine arrangement buying a house next door to the church, Michie Sensei felt Kami Sama was choosing him as successor. Now she said "I had a feeling Kami Sama pushing me after spring gotaisai. Specially, after visit Fukuoka church for 4th Head Minister's funeral service." Therefore, in August, Michie Sensei sent out her Head Minister resignation letter with request for Andy Sensei to succeed as the 4th Head Minister of Portland Church. In October, after returning from a seminar at Honbu Headquarters in Japan, she went to the Vancouver Grand Ceremony. Shortly after returning, she ended up having to go to the emergency room; diagnosed with diabetes she didn't know she had. "Then officially December, Andy Sensei became Head Minister so, that was great timing."

2014 Sep - Anzen Japanese Import store closed. But through blessings and divine arrangements, able to sign a contract with Uwajimaya around a month before in August. Seamless mochi production and income, did not miss even one month. It is through our mochi fundraiser that the church finances are somewhat stable. Also, "Bachan's Mochi" brand was born!



2015 – Website Launch. We have been wanting a website for so long. Back around 2007, we were going to hire a friend to design one with Dream Weaver software, so prepared a layout of all the elements we wanted and content for it. But it never happened. Frustrated, but felt Kami Sama saying it wasn't time yet. Waiting...for what?

Finally, we had the time to look into it more in 2015. Also, the web building software and online tools had taken off by then. Things that professional designers/programmers had to do before, were easily done in templates by sites like WIX and Squarespace. It was also the first year that Squarespace automatically formatted your website for mobile phone use. (You still had to change it manually on other websites – this was something we didn't even know about when we signed up.)

Now, we can easily change anything we need because we put it together and don't have to go through anyone else. HUGE time and cost savings!

I think this is what Kami Sama was waiting for – for the technology to develop. Had we put the money and effort in before, we wouldn't have switched to anything else because it would have been too hard.



2016 Jun - Joined Montavilla Street Fair – Prayer Tree

In the past 10+ years before, we had tried making and selling mochi at the Richmond School Spring Festival, imagawayaki at Uwajimaya Festival, udon at the Jade District Fair, wrapped roses to kids for \$0.50 on Mother’s Day, and even applied for and received a grant to run a family fun night at the community center. All but one of these events were far, or across town from the church.



In joining this new street fair, we finally found our place to meet our local community. Because it’s in our own neighborhood, people said things like, “I pass by there all the time, been meaning to ask about it!” Not having to sell anything has made a tremendous difference because we can now concentrate on just being there as a church to help people with prayers and have time to talk (instead of being busy cooking). Estimated 10,000 people attended. Thank you Kami Sama!

Highlights 2006-2016

- 2006 75th Anniversary
- 2008 Various fundraisers and activities started including:
Richmond School spring festival, church golf tournament, Sunday School field trips and Halloween party, line dancing lessons at church, holiday charity party for foster children
- 2010 Rev. Andrew Uzunoe becomes Forth Head Minister of the Konko Church of Portland
- Mother’s day rose sale began
- 2011 80th Anniversary
- 2013 Rev. Amy Uzunoe-Chin became KCNA Assistant CAM
Church fishing club started
- 2014 Anzen closed, Started Mochi with Uwajimaya
- 2015 Church website launched
- 2016 Joined Montavilla Street Fair

75th Anniversary - 2006



**Sunday School Zoo
Outing 2007**

**Packy the Elephant's
birthday!**



**Themed Senior
Appreciation Day
2016**



Rev. Andrew Uzunoe as Fourth Head Minister - 2010



80th Anniversary - 2011



Chapter 6 – The Next Generation

Spreading and passing on the legacy 2017 to present

Michie Sensei has always stressed practicing faith with your family. She taught that practicing faith on your own might be easier, faster, and might go farther, but practicing with the whole family will spread wider, deeper, and continue for longer. Our Founder Konko Daijin taught,

What should be the goal in practicing faith? The sick come to pray for a cure, while the healthy come to pray for a good harvest or for a prosperous business. But these goals are only temporary. When practicing faith, you must look forward to a future free of anxiety, or else your faith won't continue.

In order to free your future from anxiety, not only must divine blessings be received by you, but also it is important that you practice a faith that will be passed down to future generations. It cannot be passed down if the family is not harmonious and if the family head doesn't practice faith.

Requesting to stop pain is the start of faith. However, after being cured and offering thanks, one will stop coming to worship. Reforming your heart and receiving a healthy child are the most important goals of practicing faith. Kami won't be happy with only one generation of faith.

(Voice of the Universe #310 / Gorikai II Yamamoto Sadajiro 7-1, 2, 3)

May this way of Faith be passed down for many generations to come.

3/2017 Newsletter - Disasters You Cannot Foresee by Rev. Lisa Uzunoe

...Growing up, I used to read the New Year's teaching when I received it, and then promptly forgot about it for the rest of the year. Now, in helping prepare them for everyone, I understand how much prayer goes into the service and teachings so that every person who receives them (random order) will receive the one teaching that will spiritually nurture and guide them in whatever they are experiencing or will experience within that year...

This year's teaching reads,

Think of Kami as your parent and Kami will think of you as His child. You know that if a child is not with his parent, the child may be bullied. But with the parent, the child will not be bullied. Since you never know when misfortune or disaster will strike, you cannot avoid them even if you want to. But if you have faith while thinking that Kami is your parent, **Kami will protect you from disasters you cannot foresee.**

(Gorikai II Ichimura Mitsugoro 3-1, 2 / Voice of the Universe #37)

Because of my past experiences with New Year's teachings, when I read this one my first thought was, "Oh no! What BIG disaster is coming!?" But because I pray everyday, and I know all of you do too, for protection and guidance for our community, church believers, and families, I trust that whatever may come, we will be protected.

The other day, I was looking through the pictures on my phone when I came across this one. Yes, some of you may have already seen it. But it was our neighbor's tree that fell on our little Civic the morning after the first ice storm in December. The most amazing part was that the heavy branch missed the Toyota altogether, and there was no damage to the Civic. (Actually there was. I found a few tiny dimples on the top about 3 weeks later. I only saw those because the light was hitting the roof of the car just right.)

But there was no other damage because by the time the tree fell in the morning, the car had been coated in an armored shell of ice at least a centimeter thick. The ice had scrapes from branches down the side of the car, and the weight of the tree shattered the ice on the top. But the shattering dissipated enough energy to spare the car.



Unforeseen disaster = fallen tree. Kami's protection = timing and shield of ice.

Then, during the week we had 2-3 feet of snow in early January, I had to take MAX (Lightrail) and bus to work. Everyday there was some kind of delay, but the last day I took it, it was ridiculous beyond belief.

Somehow I missed the MAX stop where I transfer to a bus. So got off at the next stop, and trudged through the snow and slush to a closer bus line (which was a mistake, because had I stayed on the MAX, it would have taken me directly to where I was walking).

Missed the first bus that left as I got to the corner, and had to wait for the next one. Got on the bus, and within 3-4 blocks, this bus hit the mirror of a parked car! Had to stop, call it in, wait for a call back.

Couldn't get off the bus to get on the next one because the street was too narrow for the one behind him to pass. Was thinking, "Really!?" maybe I should have walked the longer distance to get to my regular line, while texting my supervisor AGAIN, about the additional delays.

All the time in my head, I was asking Kami sama, “What am I supposed to be realizing? Did I do something wrong? What am I supposed to see here?” Especially because it took me through downtown, which I normally by-pass on the other bus line. As the bus driver parked over to the side and let us off, getting on the next bus, we all had to crowd in. Standing, I could see the tires of the cars driving on the icy downtown streets.

Then it hit me. We were supposed to have a Mochitsuki meeting downtown the next day. All highways and most main streets were drivable by now, so figuring downtown would obviously be cleared, I was planning to drive the Civic. But now, standing there on the bus, seeing that the downtown streets were much more sloped than I realized, and that it was not plowed, de-iced, or melted at all (not to mention the previous bus sliding around and hitting another car even with chains on) I agreed to call off the meeting and reschedule.

If I had not seen it for myself, I probably would have pushed to have our meeting anyway because it was already crunch-time. As troublesome this experience was, it prevented a far greater disaster. Andy wouldn’t be happy to get a call saying, “Hi Hunny, um...can you come pick me up? I’m stuck downtown!” Or have gotten into an accident. Worse yet, have another committee member get into an accident because of my decision.

“if you have faith while thinking Kami is your parent. Kami will protect you from disasters you cannot foresee.”

Most of you are parents, and even those of you who are not I’m sure have little siblings, kids, or babies you watch out for. How many times have you moved things out of the way, put your hand in front of the table they were about to hit, cushioned their falls, kept them from running into the street, take away something they would choke on or hurt themselves with? Several times a day, right? ...And how many of those times did they **know** you were protecting them?

I believe this teaching was given to me, not necessarily because there were disasters in the future, but to come to more deeply realize the tremendous blessings, guidance, and protection that Kami sama always and constantly provides us with every day. **All teachings truly help us become more humble and fill us with gratitude and joy.**

I pray you will receive your New Year’s teaching with a renewed appreciation, take the time to reflect upon it, and let it guide you throughout the year.

Stay safe, warm, and healthy! Thank you.

**6/2017 Newsletter - The Joy of Faith by Rev. Dick Dusek (Tacoma Fellowship)
Sermon from Vancouver Grand Ceremony**

...It's amazing when we look at our heart. The natural balanced rhythm of our spirit, just opens up with faith. With faith, the blessings appear within us. Day to day I've been more and more amazed by the blessings that I and my family have been receiving. How about you and your families? This heart, this spirit, is a gift from Kami sama. And we are coming here to appreciate Tenchi Kane No Kami Sama, the Divine Parent of the Universe. Day after day, even without asking, we're receiving more and more blessings. What I want to talk about today are the blessings of faith.



It's not just the blessings of life. Because even without faith, we are taught that everyone receives blessings. But with faith, it's that type of experience where, "how did this happen?" It's beyond our imagination. Some things appear impossible. Here I was on the freeway coming here this morning. I was raining pretty hard, I just left the house. The speedometer doesn't work, it's set at zero. What speed am I driving? I don't know! Then suddenly it jumps up and I suppose that's the speed I was going. Then it jumps back down to zero and up and down and up and down. And I go through all the red lights, and all the small streets, then I get on the freeway. Going up North on I-5, I'm praying to Kami-Sama. "Kami-Sama, may this training be fulfilled. Shugyo jouju onegai shimasu." You know something? Never had any trouble with the speedometer after that. Now how does that happen?!

I'm working in a parking lot Monday through Friday, I do a security job. I am the security guard in the parking lot for about three blocks. It's kind of hilly and way down at the bottom of the hill is what we might what we want to call, "the homeless village."

So a lot of homeless like to sleep there at night, and it's my job to get them out of there, the public parking lot so that my customers and people who park will not be "freaked out" can we say. I've been working now there for five years. For most of those five years, it was a very hard job. First thing in the morning, there were few or maybe up to a dozen homeless sleeping in different parts in the dark parts down the hill. Nobody can see them, but they are there and it's my job to get them out. And I worked very very hard and got very very tired and can I say I didn't receive blessings.

Well, my heart started changing, but Kami Sama had to work very hard to get me to listen. Because what happened was that I had to start my job 30 min earlier. So here I am going down the hill, seeing the homeless 30 min earlier that I usually do. And they don't want to get up-it's too early. One guy even shouted and yelled at me. I didn't want to argue with him he wasn't, luckily, not too much taller than I was, but some of them can get pretty big! This guy was always out of the parking lot, always obeyed all the rules, he never did anything wrong. He even tried to help other people. But here he is yelling and screaming at me that you can't out! What do you do? What I did was completely stop. What's happening? Now you have to realize that Kami sama works in mysterious ways, just like it says in the prayer.

I've heard, our Founder even teaches, "Instead of practicing faith like a cherry blossom, practice faith like a plum blossom." Now what's the difference? Even in the teaching it teaches you. Cherry blossoms fall quickly. Plum blossoms endure the cold and fall much later. Practice faith like the plum blossom. Then I heard something just this morning. You know how the best way to fertilize a plum tree? Is with poop. Very dirty stuff to put into the ground, and make it very very fertile, and you get a beautiful plum tree that endures the winter and stays on, and we're suppose to work like the plum tree.

Well here I am, this homeless guy is yelling and screaming at me, so I go away and he leaves the lot anyway! I didn't have to do anything. The next day, I don't want to fight with him. So I completely stop and pray to Kami Sama, "What am I do to?" And I just watched. Do you know that everybody left the parking lot? And it's been going on like this for two months now.

Now before, it was about ten people or more. Now, it's like twenty five people! Because maybe you've known in the news, maybe you don't but the Seattle homeless were pushed out. And then just lately, Tacoma homeless have been pushed out, so some of them come to my parking lot. So the number has doubled. But you know? I have no job, I have no worries. I turn to Kami Sama, I pray, and what happened?

This guy who was yelling and screaming at me? Since last month, he comes and talks to me. He is worried about this other guy who doesn't want to follow the rules. Or this other woman comes up, "Hey, this person is a trouble-maker." Or "this person they're leaving," or something. They're asking me, "What can we do?" Say, "You just have to make it inconvenient for them." But I don't do anything, they come to me. In the morning, my boss wants to know how many homeless, so I have to count them, and that's how I know. One day I almost had thirty people.

But I do almost nothing. I walk away, I write the number down in my report, and I wait and I pray.

They take care of themselves. And I'm talking about the blessings of faith here. So WHY do I think this is the blessing of faith? Because not only is this man or this woman being helped, but they are helping others. AND not only are they only getting out of the parking lot, they're picking up their trash and keeping the parking lot clean.

This didn't happen before. They want to stay there, and they've been told that they need to do this and that and that. And if they don't, we'll call down the big guys - I'll call the police, or the "clean up crew" - community services. They will come down and kick them out even more and they will call the police. Everybody is helping, they're helping me, so we're all receiving Kami Sama's blessings.

My prayer has changed. Before I used to pray, "May the homeless get out of there. May they follow my authority." I'm a security guard! I have to get you out of here. Get out! I actually speak to them more nicely because I don't want to fight with them. But, my heart was like that. Now my prayer, I want each one of them to feel the blessings they are receiving each and every day. Even though they are homeless. Even though they do this or that. What are they doing? They are following their heart, doing what they want to do, keeping the place clean, and helping other people to follow the same rules. They are gaining confidence in themselves I hope, and developing. I don't know. I just pray that whatever their next step is, that they will step forward.

Are you receiving blessings in faith, each and every day? When I step out of my house, just before the door we received from our Portland Church, a beautiful mirror. If you ever come to Tacoma, you'll see this nice mirror. As you stand there before you go, you look at your face, you look at your clothing, "is everything good?" "Am I presenting a good spirit?" I've also been told, the theme this year, "Shine from within. Smile within." Are you smiling? Are you appreciating? That you have a spirit that has been given to you by the Divine Spirit of the Universe. Each and every one of us. And when your faith progresses to the point where you see more and more of the blessings that you are already receiving, you'll be amazed!

I was trying to do Kami Sama's work in the parking lot, kicking people out. Kami Sama made it easy for me. I don't have to do that job like that. What was a problem was not a problem. I prayed for it, and yes, every morning later on I have to wake people up. But how do they wake up? "Oh thank you!

Yeah, I overslept today. I'll get right out." I don't have to fight with anybody. They all know, and we all work together. And they're gone.

Just last Friday, I had a different situation, I was worried. A couple people in a tent, and all this gear outside of the tent. Oh no, how is all this stuff going to be moved? So quickly I talk to people who were standing there, "You know you got to get that tent out of there." "Oh yeah, yeah." Found out I talked to the wrong people. They just left and the tent and stuff were still there. Later on I came back, I had to talk to people I could not see- inside the tent. "Uh oh, what's going to happen. I'm going to have to call the police, I think." Kind of scary business here. I did try to call the police, but I gave up. They put me on hold, they couldn't answer their phone, they were too busy. So I hung up and what I saw ten minutes later... They pulled out all that gear, they turned down their tent, they got everything out, they left. What I thought was a problem, was not a problem. Now how does that happen?!

Can you receive blessings? All you have to do is turn, pray, and trust in Kami. You're heart will open and you will see that even brushing your teeth in the morning, or whatever it is on your table or outside your door, or going to school, that Kami Sama is always with you, and that heart that Kami Sama gave you can be shiny and smiley, and receiving more and more blessings all the time. If you close up and don't accept the blessings, Kami Sama can do nothing.

It says that when young lady gets married, she's given a mirror. And the mirror is used to look at her face when things are going bad. So that she can adjust and not put on a bad face to other people so that she can maintain family harmony and happiness around her neighborhood. If we use our faith like this mirror. If we use the teachings of Konko Daijin like a mirror, we'll be able to shine and open our hearts and realize, "Kami sama is blessing us each and every day, even beyond our imagination." Anyone can do it. It doesn't take the Founder of the religion. It doesn't take a minister. It just takes faith.

Receive the blessings of faith. Problems do not need to be a problem. They can actually raise the level of your faith to receive blessings beyond your imagination.

Thank you.

6/2017 Newsletter Article – Celebration of Life Service for Shizu Akagi

Passing away peacefully on Easter Sunday, a memorable service was held on 5/13 at the Portland Church.

Becoming one of the pillars of our church, Shizu diligently attended the daily 5am morning prayers, and was always in the kitchen helping Michie Sensei with making sushi, chowmein, mochi and other foods for the various services.

“...The lighting shape of the paper symbolizes the intensity and directness of which our prayer is to reach Shizu,” was the explanation of the Sacred Tamagushi branch offering in her service pamphlet.

Shortly after the service began, thunder rumbled in the distance. (We get thundershowers from time to time, but they’re usually brief and disappointingly weak.) However, the rumbling continued, and right after Andy Sensei addressed Shizu at the mitama altar, praying for her to join her ancestors, there was a **thunderous** crash.

Truly felt the strong virtue of the Akagi ancestors and family, and that our prayers had reached Shizu’s mitama!

Her daughter-in-law commented, “During the service I was listening to the thunder and lightning, I think my mother was saying what a wonderful and beautiful service...”

**Thank you Shizu for your hard work, dedication,
and humble selfless service!**



10/2020 Celebration of Life Service sermon excerpt—For Frank Sunada, Sr.

Frank Kazuma Sunada was a solid man all about family. Family is why he began coming to the Konko Church. Rev. Michie told me that he first started coming with Jerry Inouye to pray for their grandson who had been seriously injured in a car accident. He was willing to do anything to save him.



They asked our former Head Minister, Nobuharu Uzunoe Sensei, “Sensei, onegai shimasu!” and prayed together for his recovery. Although he had to wear a neck brace for some time, his grandson recovered without any permanent damage and is able to live a normal life.

Since then, he has come to our major services, and very devotedly came to help with making mochi for the New Year – he’d be one of the first ones to arrive before the machines started at 4:00am.

I believe this was out of appreciation for the blessings his family received and continued to receive, as well as because of Jerry’s influence as Jerry always said, “doing goyo, or being in service to the church brings blessings.”

...Frank Sr. is now a spirit, and as he has touched every one of us here, he is now a part of the roots that support our lives. The bamboo picture and poem in your program reflects this, and Frank Sr.

So let us honor him. Live your life with his values of honesty, earning your living with your own two hands and hard work, giving unconditional kindness and deep appreciation for everything...

*Strong and straight is bamboo
roots entwined to support each other
They bend and move with the changes of the wind.*

*Hold firmly to the earth and
let your heart reach for heaven
Then you too shall follow in its footsteps
Passing on the strengths and virtues of bamboo.*



5/2019 Newsletter Sermon - by Tomiye Akagi

A few months ago, I learned that one of the responsibilities of Shinto Sodai members (church elders) is to be an inspiration of faith to members. So, I suggested to Andy Sensei that our Shinto Sodai members take turns sharing their faith stories during monthly services. To my surprise, last month, Andy Sensei asked me to talk about my faith at today's service. My response was but I'm not a Shinto Sodai member, and I thought the presentations were going to take place in front of just our congregation. Andy Sensei looked at me—I believe with a smile—and said we were talking about three more people. My mind said no, no, no; but I knew Kami-sama wanted me to say yes. The learning for me was if you make a suggestion, be ready to be volunteered. So, here I am.



For me, faith is very personal. My faith is different from yours, just as your faith is unique to you. I don't feel comfortable talking about teachings or offering guidance in faith, but what I can do is share with you the transitions my faith has gone through, and how I practice faith now.

I have always been surrounded by Konkokyo. My grandparents, Reverends Isao and Tomoyo Goto, were the ministers who established the Konko Church of Hollywood, which is now the Gardena Church. After my grandfather passed away, my father, Shiro Takeda, became the head minister; and upon his death, my mother, Sadako Takeda, took his place.

I have also attended church my entire life. As a child (and I'm sure this is true for most children), I attended church because my parents took me. But I also went because I loved my grandparents. For me, church and my grandparents were one and the same, so church is a very comfortable place for me.

But having grandparents and parents who were ministers, and regularly attending church does not mean I have understood our religion or diligently practiced faith my whole life. My faith development and learning about our religion has been a gradual and long process. I am grateful to Kami-sama for providing me with opportunities and for patiently guiding me all these years.

As a child, I sat through services and sermons in Japanese that I did not understand. Not all was lost on me, though. I knew Kami-sama was our God.

Also, I saw ministers and church members who prayed with such sincerity and who seemed truly happy to be at church. I watched my grandfather give sermons with great energy and conviction. Through these childhood observations, I learned that I was to be kind, helpful and appreciative.

But that wasn't enough. As I grew older, I wanted more. I felt the need to find out about our religion. Kami-sama understood this and arranged for me to become a member of the KCNA Translation Committee. This is where I learned about our Founder and religion and got answers to my questions—and it was great because it was all in English! Kami-sama also allowed me to increase my knowledge at the Research Institute at Hombu. I am so appreciative of these opportunities, but I came to realize that having knowledge does not mean the same as having faith.

A pivotal point in my faith development came when my mother fell gravely ill. The doctors with all their science could not figure out what was wrong, and told us she could die. When I was alone, I cried and started praying sincerely for the first time in my life. I asked Kami-sama to allow my mother to get well. In exchange, I promised to go to the seminary in Japan. But it wasn't just my prayers Kami-sama was listening to. There were dozens of people praying for my mother. My grandparents cut short their trip to Japan to return home, and church members gathered at the church to offer prayers. After a week of ups and downs, Kami-sama answered those prayers and my mother recovered. This is when I began to understand the power and importance of prayer.

But my mother's journey was not over. Before her release, the doctor told her she had cancer and needed surgery. It was a great shock, but there was a silver lining. In trying to determine the cause of my mother's illness, the doctors had run a battery of tests. Without those tests, the cancer would not have been discovered. This experience taught me that medicine is not an exact science, and that it was Kami-sama who guided the doctors to help save my mother.

For days, I grappled with my promise to Kami-sama. I had told no one else, so I thought of not honoring my promise. Fortunately, Kami-sama guided me, and I told my mother, who told my grandfather, who made the arrangements for me to attend the seminary. This was a blessing because during my three months at the seminary, I not only learned more about our religion, I practiced and lived faith 24/7.

There have been other turning points in my faith. It has changed and will continue to evolve. Today, I feel comfortable with what I know about our Founder and our religion. This doesn't mean there isn't more to learn, it just means I don't feel the need. I try to remember the faith of my grandparents and parents so that I may have a faith and live a life they will be proud of. I don't always understand what Kami-sama is trying to teach me, but whatever happens, I try to find the silver lining and keep the faith.

My faith is simple. I start with saying good morning to Kami-sama—giving thanks for the day before and expressing appreciation for the day ahead of me. During the day, I give thanks to Kami-sama when I realize a blessing, and try to be kind to people and nature. At night, I thank Kami-sama for the blessings of the day, apologize and make requests. Praying takes practice and effort. I try to stay in the moment and concentrate because if I don't focus, my mind wanders.

I am grateful for the daily miracles—health, happiness, love of family and friends, being safe, and being able to live comfortably. I thank Kami-sama for the air we breathe, the water that is necessary for life, the sun, the earth, the animals and even the bugs. Recently, I have begun saying thank you to Kami-sama for our mitama-sama who have built the foundation upon which we live. I find that the more I give thanks for blessings I receive, the more blessings I realize. There is no limit to the number of blessings Kami-sama gives us.

I apologize for my shortcomings, of which there are many. I try to keep a Kami Heart, but have not yet succeeded in doing it all day long for even one day. Unfortunately, the level of my faith does not remain constant, so on many days it seems like my apology list is also infinitely long.

I pray for family, friends and myself, and ask for continued blessings and guidance to allow us to see and appreciate Kami-sama's blessings. And though it is a cliché, I pray for world peace.

The older I get, the more I realize that health should not be taken for granted. In general, I am healthy but I do have issues. One is that my aortic valve does not completely close, so blood flows back into my heart. This causes my heart to work harder, which can result in an enlarged heart. In all probability, I will eventually need surgery, but the silver lining is that Kami-sama allowed the physician's assistant to hear the heart murmur in its early stages so that my condition is being monitored.

I have come to embrace my own mortality and understand that death is inevitable. But instead of sadness, Kami-sama has helped me to appreciate the life I have, to value each day of my life, and to try to make the best of each day.

I thank Kami-sama for the love of family and friends. I have my wonderful husband, two great daughters and their significant others, three grandsons and a grandpuppy. Then, I have my four siblings and all their children and their children; and I have my Portland Church family. It is comforting to know that I can depend on others and I hope they know that I will always be there to support them.

Kami-sama continues to challenge and guide me. I have learned that even though an opportunity will take me out of my comfort zone, I need to say yes because Kami-sama is offering me that opportunity. This is why I said yes to Andy Sensei's request for me to speak today. Another example is that I recently agreed to serve as the editor of the *Konko Review*. I have no experience, but I believe Kami-sama and others will be there to support me.

I don't know what tomorrow will bring and I may not understand why things happen, but I look forward to each day with appreciation because of my faith in Kami-sama.

3/2019 – Mini Sermon by Rev. Lisa Uzunoe

On our walk to the church before driving to school, my son talked about helping a friend last with an incident last week. He mentioned there was another boy causing the incident who was so mad and upset.

He talked about the boy's intense anger but in the end shrugged it off saying, "it was his fault."

When I suggested he pray for this boy, my son dismissed it. But then as we left the church and got into the car he begrudgingly said, "Why does Kami sama always give the right teachings?"

Turns out the teaching at the Mediation Seat that day was, "Do not ignore the difficulties of another after experiencing the same difficulties..."

My son had had worked hard to overcome his own emotions over the past year, and finally was in better control.

I could only smile and say thank you to Kami Sama for the back up. 😊

8/2020 Newsletter - Faith Story by Alex Djain

[Alex is a young man in New Zealand who found us on the internet in Jan of 2015 and has been seeking mediation via email since. Last year he had an opportunity to stop through Tokyo and visited his first Konko Church in Osaki (one of our parent ministers, Motoo Tanaka Sensei's church).



Developing his faith over the years, Alex has been receiving many blessings and being inspired by other stories, agreed to share his with others in gratitude. Thank you Alex for sharing!]

[Email excerpt 7/13/20]

...Konko-sama encouraged us to share Divine Blessings we receive, right?

Well, when we were in lockdown here, I temporarily lost my job (at the time it was uncertain that it was temporary. I've been learning to depend on Kami and to offer everything to Him, so I offered this situation to Him. Luckily, the government gave me substantial compensation for being out of work during the pandemic. I am so grateful.

To get even freakier, when we went down an alert level, most people were still staying at home, I was offered full time (often even more than that) work with the company I work mostly for, for around a month or so to edit educational content for children, a Home Learning Channel, during lockdown. This was great for me since I'm a contractor.

Being so busy with work I didn't have much time to go food shopping so I offered the whole food situation to Kami-Sama.

Amazingly, a priest-friend of mine contacted me and out of the blue and said that he had a box of food to give away. The next day I got another message which gave me chills - another friend of mine randomly messaged me out of the blue offering another box of food. Unbelievable!

And to top it all off I was able to get my old job back after lockdown. Apparently there was a tiny, secret corner of the budget to fund my job - which should be fine if no one asks too many questions, what incredible luck, I've been so well taken care of by Kami. Just too many freaky coincidences.

Those have been some of the major ones, there were countless others too, I feel very humbled and grateful to Kami.

[Email excerpt 7/15/20]

...One lunchtime at work it was raining quite a bit and very changeable and I needed to pop out for lunch, or stay and eat at the very expensive cafe at work. I offered the situation over and asked Kami to show me the right action and the right time and it felt quite natural to do what came next - the weather eased pretty quickly and held and I was able to pop out and I was able to trust my instincts knowing that it would hold.

...

I've learned a lot in the last couple of months about depending on Kami, our relationship and feel I'm really understanding more what Konko Daijin is saying in the scriptures. I'm still continuously learning and growing.

Best wishes,
Alex

Worship Hall at the Konko Church of Osaka



Rev. Masato Tanaka, Alex Djain, Rev. Motoo Tanaka (Head Minister)

10/2020 - Excerpts from Tsurunominato Church Grand Ceremony Virtual Sermon by Rev. Michie Uzunoe

... Sue Sensei once said, “Running out of virtue is most fearful.” She taught that red lights could be seen as green, and you can lose your life. Many years later, I had the opportunity to share this teaching with my third daughter’s husband, Dan.

One day, on his way back from flight instruction as a pilot, right before his eyes a senior pilot many years beyond his own experience, a doctor and friend of his, had issues landing. They don’t know what went wrong, but instead of heading to open ground, he ended up crashing into the only single tree in the airfield and died instantly. Shocked, [landing his own plane], Dan came straight to church and sought Mediation, where I was able to share Sue Sensei’s teaching. He is now an experienced medical pilot and flying around many places, however, I believe for him, this was an unforgettable, living teaching.



...Last November attending with KCNA to the International gathering, I was allowed to listen to Rev. Kiyoji Konko’s many respectful thoughts on Konko Sama. I was very grateful.

Afterwards I was able to have an opportunity to speak to Rev. Kiyoji and able to relay how grateful it was to hear him. How wonderful and lucky he was to have seen all the blessings and virtue through Konko Sama, his father. Lucky to have someone show him these blessings.

2nd Konko Sama had a dream, where he was handing on a pine tree branch over a cliff drop off. Kami sama instructed him to let go of one hand, he did so. Then when asked to let go of the other hand, immediately let go the other. But when realized it, he was standing at the bottom without injury.

This is a famous story. But, **why** was 2nd Konko Sama able to let go of both hands without hesitation? I believe this is because he had grown up seeing with his own eyes, the blessings and miracles the Founder (his father), had received. He believed Kami Sama absolutely, without wavering or doubt—the same trust his father had in Kami.

For myself and my husband, Rev. Kajiwara showed us many blessings in the same way. Therefore, now, I am telling my children to receive blessings people can see. Everyday I am praying I am able to receive such blessings...

...“Blessings people can see” might sound like it is bragging. However, by being able to receive blessings that are beyond coincidence or doubt, we can show people who are troubled, and others who hear about them can share them with others still, so even more people can receiving blessings in the same way.

For this reason, don't just make selfish prayers or receive self-fulfilling blessings (which are blessings that only you see as a blessing), but a true blessing that is a blessing no matter who sees it.

Even during this pandemic and rioting, Kami Sama bestowed the Portland Church with such blessings. Even though the church's door, gates, and information box were vandalized, we received the blessings of protection from physical harm, and funding from insurance to replace the things that already needed replacing. This led to the fence project, and funding for this, too. But more than that, we clearly saw on camera that after the man kicked open the church door, he did not enter. But yelled at someone inside as if arguing, threw his hands up, and left. Since there was no one inside, we truly feel it was the virtue of Rev. Hirayama, and everyone's prayers that protected the church.

Kami Sama showed us that through daily faith practice and prayer, we are able to receive such blessings.

Save one person, become a Kami to that person. Save 10 and you will become a kami to all 10.

So, I pray that all of you receive blessings that show Kami's virtue and you can share with others. There are many people searching, seeking for the tiniest clue for something to show them the way.

**Become a faith signpost for others,
so that even one more person can receive blessings.**

Thank you.

2021 - Faith Story by Emily Jackson

I remember when I was about four to six years old, I really wanted this toy that I had my eyes on for a long time.

Then one day while I was at church, I was outside trying to find a four-leaf clover with my cousins. I can't really remember why I was at church or who thought of searching for a four-leaf clover, but I do know that I was really determined to find one.



I remember how happy I was when I thought I had found a four-leaf clover, but it was a three-leaf clover.

Since I was having no luck, I prayed to Kami-sama to help me find one so I can make my wish come true. This made me more determined to find one and as I kept on searching and searching, I finally found one!

I kept on thanking Kami-sama for helping me find one and I made my wish on the four-leaf clover, "Can I please please please get a baby alive for my birthday or Christmas?"

I was soo happy to find one that I ended up searching for another four-leaf clover and to my luck, I did find one soon after. So, I ended up praying for a baby alive again to make sure my first wish came true, but I was only praying for one baby alive.

When Christmas came, I got my very first baby alive toy! Then a month later, it was my birthday, and I ended up getting a different baby alive toy! I was already happy receiving one baby alive, but getting a second one blew my mind. I was extremely happy and overjoyed to be able to play with two baby alive toys!

Later, I realize that I might have gotten two of them because I wished on two four-leaf clovers.

So first and foremost, make sure your prayers are heard through a four-leaf clover!



2021 – Faith Story by Daniel Jackson, Jr.

When I was a couple months old, I was very sick. I kept on puking out food I was given. My parents kept on taking me to the doctors and one night bachan had a dream where I was going to die so she woke up and called my parents and said if they didn't take me to the hospital she would herself, so they took me.



Previously all the other doctors said there was nothing wrong with me. But that night that they took me, when I was in the ER the doctor said I wouldn't have woken up the next day. I know bachan was just doing her grandma duty but still, I owe her my life.



Kami sama blessed me with life and provided me with a family to grow with. Aunts and uncles to teach me what's right and wrong, to shape my future. Older and younger cousins to teach me what it's like to follow and to lead. The ability to make many many mistakes and learn from every single one of them.

My whole life is filled with reminders that Kami sama is watching me. No matter how badly I get hurt I've never broken a bone. Whenever I'm stuck with no way out something random happens to save me. Or with my current job I've fallen asleep many times during the night but Kami sama wakes me up and makes sure I don't crash.

I'm very proud of myself for what I've been able to achieve so far. I have friends that call me and ask advice. I've had adults that could be my grandparents seek out my advice. I have two friends currently that I'm teaching how to drive. I'm able to do all this because I survived that one night.

Even with things that have happened to me recently and all the hardships, my friends and cousins that I love so much help push me to better myself.



2021 The beginning of my faith started with my parents, who showed me the way in my daily life by Rev. Amy Uzunoe-Chin

A. When I was a child, I ate some fish and got a piece of bone stuck in my throat. My parents gave me a piece of “goshinmai” (sacred paper) to swallow. I don’t remember personally, but according to my parents, I was reluctant at first but finally obeyed them. The sacred paper wrapped or bushed the bone down allowing me to breath and swallow again normally. We were all relieved and grateful to Kami.

B. It was in middle school when I first really thought about Kami, if Kami really does exist. How can I believe in something I cannot see? One day, I challenged Kami to give me straight A’s. The Mediator (Rev. Nobuharu Uzunoe) taught me how to pray. Do not just pray to get straight A’s, but pray to Kami every day and ask Kami to help understand the materials in the book, to understand the teacher’s lessons. So, I did, every day I went to church before going to school. The day report cards came home, I was literally scared to open it. To my shock (because I must have still been doubting Kami), I was in awe of seeing all A’s on my report card. This was the beginning of my journey, my own relationship, not my parent’s faith, but MY relationship with Kami. To be honest, even if I know I got straight A’s, I was still not convinced 100%, but still, it was a beginning.

C. In 2015, I had to make a decision whether I wanted to become the KCNA Chief Administrative Officer. In my mind, I was doubting if I was the right person for this important position. I first prayed to Kami, saying that I would leave the decision all up to Kami, and I would follow whatever Kami wanted me to do. I prayed like this for months. However, then, my parent Minister told me that I have to decide whether I want to do this goyo, then tell Kami and ask Kami for guidance. He told me that “just leaving it up to Kami” was an excuse, because whichever I choose, Kami will support you. Once I thought about it and made a decision to accept the position if I was nominated. However, I must still have doubt somewhere in my mind. I kept asking Kami, “really? ME?, will KCNA be okay with someone like me?” I kept asking Kami, “Daijyobu?” (Are you sure this is okay?)

I didn’t think I was worthy or good enough, thus I started to worry again. This is when I had a dream which helped me solidify my decision. In my dream, I was walking through a couple of rooms that were familiar, I couldn’t exactly tell where I was, but by the what I can tell, I knew it was the hallways and rooms behind the Worship Hall at Honbu in Japan. The room I was in was very dim, but as I continued to walk forward and was drawn to a bright light that was streaming through a door that led to another room next door. As I

opened the door, my eyes were drawn my grandfather who was casually and happily talking together to Rev. Heiki Konko (5th Konko Sama)! My grandfather who passed away when I was attending Ministry School (Gakuuin) had been a devout believer and strong faith figure for the Uzunoe family. However, he has never come into my dreams before, Rev. Heiki Konko has never come into my dream before either, this was the very first time.

I immediately ran over to my grandfather and hugged him tight and I remember askingare you sure I am on the right path? He responded "Daijyobu, you are on the right path". This is when I looked up and saw Rev. Heiki Konko's face looking back at me and just smiling back at me. Later reflecting back, I believe this was Kami telling me, or assuring me not to worry, that I would be guided every step of the way. Konko Daijin will be watching over too.

After marriage, not only did the family grow, but so did Konko Faith, enabling planting/nurturing of four more seeds of faith.....

2021 What is life after we pass away? Are they spirits? Ghosts?

by William Chin

I never believed in ghosts and spirits, or an afterlife. I was raised by a Christian mother, but I never liked going to church. I do believe that there is something that is of a "higher power" but due to various experiences in the past, religion become a "joke" to me especially with many ministers who I saw as a "hypocrite". Thus, I did not believe or trust the people of worship. So, to Amy's surprise, she must have wondered why I agreed to marry a minister's daughter and someone who was going to Japan to become a minister.



Getting married is a bond that not only shares families together, but also molds one's belief and faith. I believe it is through Amy's faith that I believe that there is a Kami. The following stories may be something one may consider it as coincidence, but

The most vivid experience that Amy and I had together was the year my grandmother "Grandma Ho". There are 3 parts to what I experienced, before she passed away, after she passed away, and the main prayer (saishi) catching on fire during the Spring Autumn Memorial Service.

I would like to share my journey I had "after she passed away." I drove all the way from Portland to San Francisco after receiving news that

“Po Po” (Grandma Ho) was not going to last very long. It was a long drive down to San Francisco, with every transportation that I tried to take would break down. My car, the greyhound bus and the Amtrak [train]. By the time I reached San Francisco to my Uncle and Auntie’s house....on “foot”, to my disappointment, I was too late, she had already passed away AND had already been cremated. I was truly sad not being able to see “Po Po” before she passed, but little did I know that it was her wish NOT to see her in that state.

Amy called me that day and asked me what color and food “Po Po” liked. I told her she liked the color “purple”. Later, I learned that Amy had bought a small purple potted of flower to offer to “Po Po” on our home altar.

I stayed in San Francisco for a couple more days before heading back home, but before I left my Aunt and Uncles asked me whether I would like to take some of “Po Po’s” ashes back home with me. I remember calling Amy to consult her opinion. She told me, in Konko Faith, we believe in taking care of our Ancestors; even after one pass away, we continue to pray for their spirits to be happy. Thus, she asked me if it would be okay if we took care of her spirit, she wanted to ask me and my family if it would be okay.

Amy and I pondered on whether my family or even “Po Po” would feel about being taken cared as mitama in the Konko Faith, I wasn’t sure what to do.

However, the next day I received a phone call from Amy saying, “Po Po does want us to take care of her spirit!” I naturally questioned her in confusion. She explained to me that when she was doing her afternoon prayers, she prayed to Po Po’s spirit, asking her what she wanted us to do. Whether she wanted us to take care of her spiritually. As Amy finished her prayers, she looked up and looked at the purple potted flower that she had offered my grandmother a few days before. For some reason she felt the urge to look at the plastic tag that had all the information of the flower, including that name of the flower. When she read that the flower was named, “Get Me” (short for Forget-me-not)!

It could not have been clearer than this, my grandmother was telling me that she does want us to take care of her.

Ever since then, we have been taking care of her at our home altar and at the church services.

2021 - Trust Kami by Madeline Uzunoe-Chin

My last year as a Senior in High School, I was a bit overwhelmed with where I would go to college.

Aiming to become a collegiate swimmer, I had high hopes of going to one of the 5 colleges that I receive a “letter of intent”, I even visited several campuses and swim teams, however, either due to personal comfort level or due to financial stretch.



My mother always reminded me to pray to Kami for guidance, sometimes what I want and what is best for me may be to different paths. Thus, I prayed to Kami for guidance to the best choice for ME.

The last week of “decision day”, I had a vivid dream and my deciding factor. In my dream, my parents handed me a whole cookie, and when I broke the cookie in half, lots of purple and white sprinkles came falling out. This is when I knew where I would be going that Fall term to pursue BioMed, to the University of Washington Tacoma.

As I reflect back once again as I tell this story, I am again grateful for this path Kami has guided me. If I had gone out of town for school, I would have had to come back home or find another place to stay outside of the school if I wanted to stay close to campus due to the Pandemic. It would have been a moving and transportation stress and nightmare.

In addition, I also found out that, at the University I was seriously considering to go, the head coaches were fired so the swim team has been cancelled for the season right now.

So, it is true, “sometimes what I want and what is best for me may be different,” but I wouldn’t have known if I had not trusted Kami.



2021 - Kami's protection by Christopher Uzunoe-Chin

My parents always tell me to think before I act, look before I act and now, my mom always tells me to pray to Kami before I act. I have always been known to be curious, just like Curious George. Curiosity is a great thing, but it can get me into trouble or even danger.



-My mom had a dream when I was about 3 old. She had a dream of me walking towards Niagara Falls. She said she was yelling at me to stop, but I kept walking and I fell into the falls. Ever since then, she has always reminded me to be careful and “listen” and “think” before acting.

-Walking in a parking lot, I almost got run over by a big truck. My mom stopped and pulled me in time.

-I was 4-5 years old, I got curious of the iron that was on the church table. Somehow, I burned my face with the tip of the hot iron. My mom tended to me and prayed. She put goshinmai at home and prayed some more. Thankfully, there is no evidence of a scar to this day.

-I was about 6 years old, my parents took me to a community pool. I was so excited I remember just jumping into the pool, but then started to drown. I realized I couldn't swim after I jumped in. Thankfully, my mom was paying attention and was able to pull me up.

My mom always tells me that I am protected by Kami through the blessings of my family and ancestors, but I need to start praying to Kami on my own for continued protection.

[Christopher has gotten his license as a lifeguard and worked for YMCA as a youth swim instructor, became captain of his high school swim team, and will be swimming collegiately with a scholarship received by Aquinas, a private university in Michigan. Clearly prayers put into action.]



2021 - Starting of a relationship with Kami by Matthew Uzunoe-Chin

I have never prayed to Kami before with a focused purpose. It wasn't until my Freshman year to pray for something I truly wanted and needed Kami to hear my prayers.

Just like my siblings who all swam in High School, I started on the Varsity Boy's Swim Team and had plans to possibly swim collegiately. So, that summer, my dad signed me up for a swim camp. The problem that we realized afterwards, due to misunderstandings, was that the camp dates were the same week as the KCNA Youth Camp dates.



We tried to see if we can cancel or get a refund, but the site said there were no refunds. I was really looking forward to going to Youth Camp so I was terribly disappointed. I even told my dad that I would be willing to pay out of my own money for the cancellation fee or the money that couldn't be refunded. I think it was about \$600.

My mom talked to me and asked me to try to ask Kami for help. For some reason, I felt compelled to try, my mom and I prayed in front my altar in my room and prayed really hard to Kami. I think we prayed for about 30 minutes. That evening, my dad tried calling them to see if he could talk to someone directly. Kami must have listened to my prayers, we were able to get a full refund. I was so happy because I was able to go to the Youth Camp that summer.

Little did I realize at that time but my mom had seized the opportunity to help me try to connect with Kami, establish a relationship with Kami.

Family Faith by Amy Uzunoe-Chin

Looking back, the seed that our parents, grandparents, ancestors sowed has been nurtured and fertilized for us to grow.

Our wish is that we are able to continue to show Kami's workings in our daily lives ("Kami wo arawaseru) and hand down the faith to our children and family and those around us.

Every single member of the family has experienced Kami's divine workings in different ways. It is important to teach and show my family Konko Faith through our actions, working out problems together with Kami as the center of guidance. Faith begins, deepens, grows and prospers with Family.

2021 - Integrating Prayers and Faith into My Daily Life by Tomiye Akagi

Reciting prayers at church is something I've been doing since childhood but I must confess that until recently, I did not appreciate their value. Instead, I preferred to have "conversations" with Kami and my mitama about things going on in my life.

Then, a little over a year ago, I started writing down and reading my personal prayers to Kami and my mitama, and also included prayers for my family and friends. About six months ago, sometime since coronavirus restrictions began, I added the reading of prayers from the *Prayer Book* in my daily routine.

While reading the prayers, I try to focus on the words and the meaning behind the words. Sometimes I pause mid-prayer to think about what I've just read. I have learned that the ability to pray sincerely and wholeheartedly takes time and effort because, unfortunately, there are many times when my mind wanders, and I go on auto-pilot and merely recite the words. When this happens, I stop, apologize to Kami and re-focus.

The prayers provide me with guidance. They help me to be more aware of Tenchi Kane No Kami's wishes and blessings, Ikigami Konko Daijin's sincere devotion to both Kami and people, and the many sacrifices made by and the challenges overcome by our mitama. Prayers remind me to be grateful, appreciative and apologetic; and how important it is to have a Kami-centered heart and a Kami heart. They make me realize that faith and life are intertwined, and that I should take an active part in my faith development and live my faith.

For me, however, I have found that saying just the prayers is not enough. What connects me with Kami, Konko Daijin and the mitama are my personal prayers. My "conversations" allow me to offer personal thanks, acknowledge and apologize for my shortcomings, and make specific requests to Kami. It is also the time when I pray for and to my mitama, and for my family, friends and me one by one. I try to think about and understand the blessings—big and small—I receive and truly appreciate them. I try to express my appreciation but know that blessings are infinite and I can never say thank you enough for all that Kami has blessed me with. I also try to offer apologies with a sincere heart but understand that my shortcomings are also infinite.

For me, faith development requires active participation. Faith is not static and the level of my faith can vary from one day to the next. There is something more to learn or question each day about my relationship with Kami, the blessings I receive and the challenges I am faced with. Kami has given me many blessings and life is good. I live through Kami's blessings.

To better understand and appreciate those blessings, I am trying to practice my faith in my daily life but I am nowhere close to continuously having a Kami heart or a Kami-centered heart. I am a work in progress.

Yet, I try to see the blessings in the challenges of life. Many family and friends have passed away in the last few years, but I appreciate them being in my life and am grateful that the mitama are with Kami-sama and continue to look over us. I have a heart condition but through Kami-sama's blessings, it was caught in its early stages and is being monitored. Then, there is COVID-19 that has changed the way we live, but I am so grateful to Kami-sama for guiding scientists to create vaccines to help keep us safer.

My family and I have received many blessings from Kami-sama, and the workings of Kami-sama always amaze me. Just last summer (the 4th of July weekend [2019]), we experienced Kami-sama's divine arrangements on the way back from camping at the beach. Blessing...

#1: Randy noticed a red light on our brake system for the trailer.

#2: Looking online, calling many shops, finally found one that could help

#3: It would be a four-hr wait before the mechanics could take a look but the weather was beautiful, so we took a long walk and had lunch.

#4: It turned out that the problem was not serious.

#5: Unfortunately, a part needed to be found that meant the trailer might have to stay overnight. However, in about 30 minutes, one of the mechanics found the part nearby and was able to pick it up.

#6: Happy to finally get back on the road, we took a left into the center turning lane when the car jerked and there was a loud noise. The mechanics came running across traffic and were nice enough to fix the problem—which was unrelated to the original problem. We were, again, terribly grateful that this did not happen down the road.

#7: The mechanics were wonderful and when we called the shop, the owner said there was no extra charge.

#8: We got home safely.

Randy and I counted all our many blessings that day and thanked Kami-sama over and over again for looking after us. We have taken several trips to the beach since then, and we always say a little prayer to Kami-sama and give thanks to the mechanics when we pass by the shop.

Remembering “Kami’s blessings begin within your own heart” helps me to keep a positive attitude to appreciate all the blessings I receive.

I feel my responsibility is to continue to practice faith and show my gratitude to Kami-sama.



3/2021 Newsletter - Slay the Demons in Your Heart by Lisa Sensei

During this covid time, I have been praying to Kami Sama even more about, how I can help people, how can I be useful to Kami sama? What special training or endeavor do I need to do to do better? Then, and even now, the message has been the same, “Just keep doing what you’ve already been doing.” Very much like one of the daily teachings that says, “Your daily work is your religious training.”

Andy came home one day last month and said his coworkers told him he had to watch an anime series called Demon Slayer “Kimetsu no yaiba.” I guess it is extremely popular now, beating out Ghibili’s Spirited Away as the highest grossing movie of all time in Japan. It’s about a boy who loses his family to a demon and his sister who survived turns into one. I don’t like movies about the dead or demons as I’m very sensitive to spirits, and to me, movies with zombies and the like are not respectful of our beloved mitama. After watching a few opening episodes on Netflix, I decided I didn’t want to watch further.

That night, I had a dream that I was in a kitchen somewhere with a living room across the way. The living room was filled with dark energy – wall grotesque snarled black and orange with a dark reddish glow and a large yellow eye in the lower left corner. I could feel its heavy pull of gravity dragging me towards it as I fought to resist and held on frantically to the refrigerator. Waking up, I thought, I’m DEFINITELY not watching anymore. There are dreams, and there are dreams that I’ve come to feel are Kami Sama’s messages. Opening and inviting negative/dark energy into my life was not something I needed.

Yet closing the church the next day, I felt Kami Sama was telling me I had to finish watching it. Wondering why in the world I would need to, I remembered my training I had been working on when I first started cleaning houses. I was told once by a respected minister in Japan that I was a person who “likes just the neat clean stuff, and doesn’t like to deal with the nasty painful stuff.” To be able to help people in deep despair, I needed to roll my sleeves up and even be willing to jump into the muck if needed. So, while I was cleaning bathrooms (especially the nasty ones), I’d keep telling myself “I’m polishing my heart, I’m polishing my heart.” I learned to deal with and am able clean up the nasty without cringing anymore. But guess this is the next step.

More and more lately, I’ve been asked for mediation by people who have deeper, heavier issues. Thinking about this, the words of the high level Demon slayer (Giyu Tomioka - about 14 minutes into the first episode) came back to me. When main character, Tanjiro, begged on his knees not to kill his sister who had been turned into a demon, Giyu said,

“Stop that pathetic groveling. If it was the least bit effective, your family wouldn’t be dead. How can a weakling who can’t take the initiative in such a

situation, heal his sister? Hunt down the enemy? Don't make me laugh. The weak have no rights or choices! Their only fate is to be relentlessly crushed by the strong! The demons might know how to cure your sister! But don't think that a demon will respect your will or wishes! Naturally I have no respect for you either! That's reality!" ...“With such a fragile resolve like yours, you can't protect your sister or heal her...” Then a little later, the old man who was to train him also said, “Don't you know why you couldn't answer my question right away? It is because your resolve is too weak.”

Realizing that without resolve, without a heart strong enough to even look at the demons in people's hearts, how was I supposed to help them? I would only be drawn into the darkness myself. Praying for protection, strength and courage, I finishing watching season one. A few days later while we were discussing various things, Andy Sensei said he realized that the main character was a lot like the Founder. As he trained, he was able to find “*isshin*” or single-heartedness and maintain it 24/7 (they called it “total concentration breathing technique” in the series). Facing formidable opponents, and stronger ones each time, his fear was dispelled by the sheer determination to save his sister and immense training in order to do so. What I was grateful to see was how Tanjiro's kindness and compassion never changed even as he trained to slay the demons. To him, they were humans who transformed into demons out of their control, and his compassion saved their souls in the end.

Like a nurse who's squeamish with blood, a fire fighter needing to overcome a fear of heights, a student having to pass a class in their weakest subject to graduate, or an employee having to learn presentation skills to lead zoom meetings, we all have areas we must improve to be able fulfill our ever changing roles and goals. If we seek it, Kami Sama will allow our daily living to be our training ground to strengthen our hearts and spirits; fortifying it with divine light and love, thus “slaying” the anger, doubt, fear, and any other demons lurking within.

The Divine Reminder teaches us: “the divine favor depends upon your own heart” - you save yourself with your own heart. We need to put in the effort, yet we are not alone. When I asked Kami Sama for the strength to do so. I was shown through (another anime) called *Fairytail*, and through the KCNA Missionary Women's Society Seminar meeting we just had. There is **immense** energy and spiritual support through believing in and praying for each other. This is what families, the church, and KCNA activities are for – it filled my heart with bright loving energy. Also, “Always seek mediation before and after everything you do.” When we do so, we receive the spiritual support and virtue of the mediator, church, Konko Sama, and Ikigami Konko Daijin.

Talk about a power boost! Let us bring these teachings into our daily practice.

4/2021 Newsletter Sermon – Kami Sama's Theater by Rev. Andrew Uzunoe

...It is so nice for all of us to be able to gather, to be able to pray together, be able to thank our ancestors and those who have gone before us.



The norito [main prayer] has said many times, without all our ancestors have done, all the hardships they endured, and the tough times that were in the past, none of us, nor this Kyokai [church], or community would be here available to us today. None of the freedoms: the freedom of religion, freedom to worship, our human rights, and even our own family of flesh and blood without their hard work and sacrifices. And they had to endure a lot. Toughness is maybe a thing of the past, people say, for this life we currently live is so blessed with luxury. However, that was not the case for our ancestors, who endured many hardships, ill treatment, and acceptance so that we may live this life today.

With the virtue passed down to us, I have recently been able to do a lot more Toritsugi with people online. It has really picked up with the pandemic going on and the added stress. Now, when suddenly things are no longer easy and available and the “good life” seems to be slipping away, people have started panicking. They don't know where to turn to, and many have started looking inward, turning back to the Spirit – whatever God or religion they seek, to try to find answers when there are no longer man-made answers available. In many cases we talk a lot about how mitama works through Toritsugi and help us in our lives. Though many talks, I have come up with an analogy that I felt was really strong, and I will share this with you today.

Step with me on this journey, with the idea of a bigger cosmic perspective. Imagine that Kami Sama is a BIG theater, Broadway for plays, and in this theater everything that exists is part of Kami Sama. And on the front stage is our lives playing out with good times, and hardship full of meaning. It is a play that never ends, going on day and night forever.

Now all the people alive today are on the front stage and in the play, each a part of the whole picture, acting out their part by living their lives. But all actors and actresses cannot act forever, and after some time they have to retire. They retire to the backstage behind the curtain. This is when they pass away and become a mitama no kami. Their bodies return to earth, but their spirits stay to watch over their families and pass on their wisdom and virtue. Now that they are in the backstage, they help out the play from the shadows with lines, or props, with the curtains, and the lighting, whatever they can. A lot of the play happens in the backstage to prepare every scene and act that goes on in the front stage. Our ancestors are still here, helping us out with

our struggles with wisdom in our memories and dreams. They help out with blessings through their divine virtue they have accumulated in their lives, and with whatever they can.

Now this play is being watched by the crowd filling up the theater. These are all the children, watching and learning from the people on the main stage and watching how they live, learning the lessons of life. After many years of watching, each is eventually called to come up on stage – to start their career. Finally, to be invited up. This cycle of life continuously going on forever, each generation making their mark upon the play.

Therefore, today we hold this memorial service to honor all those who taught us, and make their mark, and are still working in the backstage for us now. But today is a special day for the play. We open the doors of the mitama altar, which is like opening the curtain a little to the backstage. Then on this one day, the play pauses, we set out tables, all the children come up, and all our ancestors are invited to this feast from the backstage. Asked to come forward so we may celebrate and thank them for all they are doing for us even now. We hold this big feast and a wonderful celebration once again all together. Here, we not only tell them of our gratitude, but show it with our actions. This thanksgiving is enjoyed by all, and fond memories are shared.

Tomorrow, everyone returns to their places, and the play picks up once more. I found this explanation to be a very understandable example for people, especially for those who are just starting out in the Konko Faith. Explaining the mitama no kami, and what they do and what they can do for us can be challenging. To help those who are stressed or have lost loved ones find a peace knowing those who have retired are not gone, nor forgotten. They are just behind the curtain now, able to help direct and watch and enjoy the play going on in the front stage from a good view, but from able to give input to help their loved ones.

So today is our chance to have this great celebration to invite everybody on stage to celebrate together and appreciate all those who in the backstage were who for years and years made their mark on the front stage and because of them the play continues. And one day that will be us, and our children and grandchildren will be on the main stage.

Thank you for attending today...Even with Covid, even with limited ability to come to the church, the altar is always so amazing. Looking at so much wonderful food, I see many connections between them...from remembering and feeling what our ancestors like--the mitama no kami are very strong here and all of us can feel it and know what to bring...Thank you for all of your hard work, staying up all night, and this morning, getting up early to bake, and coming all the way to the church to show your sincerity!

5/2021 Newsletter – Sermon by Jubei Uzunoe

Good Morning everyone, my faith story today is about how I selected my college and all the blessings I have received.

In early March of this year, I officially accepted admission to Iowa State University. After experiencing a series of events, I believe this is where Kamisama is telling me to go.



My first sign came in October of last year, when I submitted 9 college applications. In less than a week, I received a letter in the mail. It was an acceptance letter from Iowa State University. Talk about a fast response. I was really surprised but thankful that I had been accepted by one of my top choice universities so far. I *osonaed* [offered] the letter thanking Kamisama for my acceptance and prayed that everything will continue to go well.

My second sign came on the same day I received the letter of admission. After my father found out I had been accepted, he started looking deeper into Iowa State and came back saying he had a really good feeling about this place and that I would end up going there.

My third sign came over the next few months. For some reason, I had trouble with almost every other college. Some contacted me saying there were missing documents even though I had already submitted them. Others asked me to give them the same information they already had but now through a new site. I couldn't get in contact with my counselor for a long time to get the information they needed; everything just seemed to go wrong. I asked Kamisama why everything was not working. But then, I thought,

Maybe I am supposed to go to Iowa State. Well, I did ask Kamisama to help show me what college I am supposed to go to, and so far, I had been accepted by one college with no problems, and the rest had just been a pain in the rear. Maybe this was Kamisama's way of showing me where to go. If that's true, I should just accept my offer right now.

I thought of the carpenter disciple, Sato Norio, who kept following his own path, had a difficult time, and even ended up getting hurt before he realized that wasn't the right path.

So instead of having to suffer, I thought I'll just follow Kamisama's signs and skip the follow up on all the other colleges. But... my mother said I can't be lazy either and do my part, so I had to suffer anyway.

My fourth sign came in mid-February. After submitting my college applications in October, I began to apply for scholarships in November and December. One of the scholarships I applied for was the George Washington Carver Scholarship for Iowa State. This scholarship pays full tuition for all 4 years. I prayed to Kamisama and submitted my application. Three months later, I got an email from the George Washington Carver Scholarship Committee congratulating me on being selected.

When I saw it, I thought, “wow. I actually got the scholarship?!! Thank you Kamisama for this major blessing!!! Hey, this is another big sign that I am supposed to go to Iowa State.” This was especially big because I missed the Air Force ROTC scholarship qualification which pays for college tuition and more, by just 30 points on the SAT test I took my junior year. I had not been able to take it again because of Covid.

Even though I had received the full tuition scholarship, I still needed to know the full financial aid package in order to accept my offer. I received academic scholarships from George Fox University and the University of Portland for about \$23-24,000 each. But because they cost \$55,000-\$64,000 a year to attend, even with their academic and federal grants and loans, the difference was too expensive. I later received another \$11,000 need-based grant from George Fox. We kept praying for guidance.

My fifth sign came soon after in late February. On a Friday, we were returning home from an outing and my mother said, “If we can just get the financial aid package, we can see if you can accept admission, and finally sign up for housing, which has already opened. Kamisama, onegaishimasu. We need to know soon.” When we got home, I checked my Iowa State portal and there it was. Finally, thank you Kamisama.

We prayed about the \$3,469 my parents would have to pay the first year. This is the printout we highlighted (green was grants, orange was fees), and put on the altar at home. My mother prayed again, “Kamisama, onegaishimasu. How are we going to pay for this?”

The very next morning, 11 checks arrived in the mail. They were the unemployment checks my mother

Item	2023-24	2024-25	Total	2023-24	2024-25	Total
Total Estimated Tuition	\$12,000	\$12,000	\$24,000	\$12,000	\$12,000	\$24,000
Total Estimated Fees	\$1,000	\$1,000	\$2,000	\$1,000	\$1,000	\$2,000
Total Estimated Room and Board	\$15,000	\$15,000	\$30,000	\$15,000	\$15,000	\$30,000
Total Estimated Books and Supplies	\$1,000	\$1,000	\$2,000	\$1,000	\$1,000	\$2,000
Total Estimated Transportation	\$1,000	\$1,000	\$2,000	\$1,000	\$1,000	\$2,000
Total Estimated Personal Expenses	\$1,000	\$1,000	\$2,000	\$1,000	\$1,000	\$2,000
Total Estimated Health Insurance	\$1,000	\$1,000	\$2,000	\$1,000	\$1,000	\$2,000
Total Estimated Other Expenses	\$1,000	\$1,000	\$2,000	\$1,000	\$1,000	\$2,000
Total Estimated Cost of Attendance	\$35,000	\$35,000	\$70,000	\$35,000	\$35,000	\$70,000
Total Estimated Aid	\$3,000	\$3,000	\$6,000	\$3,000	\$3,000	\$6,000
Total Estimated Out-of-Pocket	\$32,000	\$32,000	\$64,000	\$32,000	\$32,000	\$64,000
Total Estimated Net Cost	\$32,000	\$32,000	\$64,000	\$32,000	\$32,000	\$64,000
Total Estimated Total Cost	\$35,000	\$35,000	\$70,000	\$35,000	\$35,000	\$70,000

applied for almost a year ago for the two months her business had to close last year for Covid, and when added up, they equaled \$3,552. (She took a picture of them.) If I wasn't sure before, I am very convinced now.



A few days later, after seeking Mediation with my Head Minister, I accepted admission to Iowa State. And this was where I was going to end my sermon but just this Tuesday, I received another huge blessing. The engineering department sent a list of system requirements for student laptops in February, and since my current laptop didn't meet the minimum, we had been researching. We found one that we thought would be best, but because it was expensive, I was hoping the community scholarships I applied for would pay for it. So, we waited.

On Tuesday, my mother just shut down her computer for the night, when she felt Kamisama telling her to go check. For some reason, it was discounted \$500 off, which was almost 1/4 the cost. After checking with my father to make sure it was legitimate, we purchased it. What my mother realized shortly after, was that with Amazon's 2-day shipping, it would arrive on April 1st—the actual date of the 90th anniversary of the Portland Church. Thank you, Hirayama Sensei!

Michie Sensei always taught us that we can receive big blessing during Gotaisai [Grand Ceremony] week, and even bigger blessings in anniversary years. I can personally guarantee this. But I also want to mention that not only are there bigger blessings, but there are bigger reminders as well. So, remember to always keep a good heart.

First, I want to thank Kamisama for all the blessings and help I have received during this process. Then, I want to thank my mother and father for the countless hours and long nights they spent helping me. And lastly, I want to thank everyone who prayed for me and helped me during this process.

The last thing I want to share is that on one of the nights I went to say thank you to Kamisama, I read this teaching...

"If you practice faith and receive divine blessings through someone's teachings, you should express your appreciation by teaching others in turn. This is the responsibility of a person who practices faith."

(Voice of the Universe #384)

So, I decided I want to share this faith story with everyone today as a way to show my gratitude. Thank you.



5/2021 - Excerpt from KCNA Scholarship essay by Jubei Uzunoe

...I was born into the Konko faith; my parents and grandparents are ministers, if not head ministers. Ever since I could remember, I have been taught about Kami and the Konko Faith. I learned how to see Kami's blessings, how to pray with a sincere heart, how to live with Kamisama in my heart, the history of our faith and church, and many other important skills and lessons. Growing up surrounded by such a strong faith, naturally, it has been passed down to me.

It was not as if I did not believe Kamisama existed, but I had never really personally experienced Kami's presence until fourth grade. This was the first time that I could remember where I really felt Kamisama and knew Kami existed. I was walking in line to go to lunch when a girl behind me started crying because she forgot her lunch. I felt sorry and wanted to help her, and as soon as I felt that, it was like I could see these words pass through me and I started speaking but it wasn't me who was speaking. I told her "don't worry, your mom will bring your lunch when we get to the top of the stairway." After I said that, for some reason, I just knew her mom would come.

When we arrived at the top of the stairway, there was her mother, running up the last set of stairs. The other person who tried to comfort the girl saw what happened, turned to me and said "woah, that was like magic." I thought to myself "woah, what was that? That was cool and weird at the same time."

When I came home, I told my parents what had happened at school. They said it was Kamisama speaking through me, and that I was able to help the girl because of the sincere feeling of wanting to help someone. After that, I have always tried to remember to keep that sincere feeling in my heart when I pray.

Since then, I have had countless faith experiences, sometimes every day. The most recent experience would be my college application. ...While going through this process, I prayed to Kami about which college is right for me, and everything seemed to go just right with Iowa State whereas I kept having trouble with other colleges, making me certain that I am supposed to attend Iowa State.

With each time I experience Kami's blessings or reminders, I feel that I am able to develop and strengthen my faith a little more; recognizing Kami's blessings faster, being more conscious of my heart, being more grateful for what I have, praying more frequently, remembering the teachings and practicing them, having absolute trust in Kami.

5/2021 Newsletter Sermon - Balance is Harmony by Rev. Lisa Uzunoe

There is a teaching in Gorkai Book of Teachings I, #19 by disciple Yamamoto Sadajiro that reads:

A married couple is the joining of two strangers. With mutual amity, they can live a full life without anxiety. Even after a quarrel, by sincere conciliation and reflection, the reasons shall become clear. The couple can understand and reflect upon these matters by themselves due to the soul, given to them by Kami, that governs their bodies. (VU#47)

And Gorikai Book of Teachings III, *Jinkyu Kyogoroku* #104

Heaven and Earth continue to live. Because Heaven and Earth are alive, all people are able to live. (VU#2)

I'm not so sure about the "without anxiety" part, but today, on the **50th Anniversary of my parent's marriage**, I would have to say, they have lived a full life together through thick and thin, and even while performing goyo in different states, continue their strong faith through their families.

We have all heard the second teaching many times, however, again **today** it holds a special meaning for our family, and everyone who has been touched or influenced by our parents. **Nobuharu Uzunoe Sensei, our father, has always been Father Heaven – strict, disciplinary, and almost unreachable in heights of faith. Michie Sensei, our mother, is Mother Earth – gentle, nourishing, and grounded/practical.** Because Heaven and Earth are alive, we (our families) are all here and alive. But not just that, I wholeheartedly believe that because my sisters and I grew up with an evenly balanced faith of both Ten & Chi, our faith is strong, continues into our children, and dare I say "complete"; in the sense that it is not lopsided, but a whole, even sphere. **This is also true for many of you here and those within our community and KCNA—they have been parents of faith for many.**

Everything in life needs balance. Physical exercise, work/life balance, food, even our relationships all need the proper balance: some exertion, some rest; some work, some play; something heavy, something light; sometimes give, sometimes take. When you have balance, you have harmony.

How do you find this balance? It is through faith, seeking mediation, and prayers. Then Kami Sama will arrange it for you. Michie Sensei and Uzunoe Sensei came from different churches in different cities and due to ancestor related incidents, both ended up at Tsurunominato Church (where in my mother's words, they were more like "rivals".) But when it came to faith or church work, they were completely in sync. However, when my mother heard a voice say she would not be happy in life if she did not marry Nobuharu Uzunoe, she asked her head minister if she had a choice or could

say no because she didn't like him much. To which Kajiwara Sensei replied, that you could ask Kami Sama up to three times. However, it would be easier if you accepted the first time. And, it would be ok if you liked him by the time you got married, wouldn't it? Which, fortunately, became the case.

You could say that it is through fate or divine arrangement that people are brought together by Kami to balance each other. Which is why we have the phrase "opposites attract." But Ten and Chi do clash occasionally – there are thunderstorms and volcanoes erupting from time to time, just as in any healthy relationship. Yet, as the first teaching says, we get through them through sincere thought, reflection, and faith - the heart of Kami we have within us. When you watch parents balance each other as they work, suffer, and grow together, it teaches you the invaluable lessons of patience, understanding, tolerance, compromise, and trust (both in each other and in Kami). Having both discipline and nurturing in faith, we have been tested and pushed to higher levels while having encouragement and support. In an era where single-parent households are all too common...I am deeply grateful for Kami Sama bringing my parents together, which has allowed all of us to see, feel, and understand a bigger fuller Tenchi Kane No Kami Sama.

Something Genji has said recently hits home here. When I told him that our job is to help people with their problems by helping them understand Kami Sama, but that starts with actually believing that Kami Sama exists, he asked, "How can people NOT see Kami Sama?" To him with his experiences, it was *atarimae* (a given). Being immersed in so much faith and virtue from the church, parents, grandparents, aunts and uncles, sometimes we fail to see just how blessed we are.

Many years ago, when we went to visit a lady's husband in the hospital who was going on hospice, we shared a few concepts of Konko Daijin's faith regarding death and ancestors. They were so deeply relieved and happy to hear them. Then, talking about other various problems they have had in their lives, she suddenly asked, "What if he had known about it [Konko teachings] earlier, he wouldn't have had to suffer so much?" I felt the issues she shared was in large part due to his perspective and attitude, so he definitely would have been able to receive blessings, and told her so. To which she lamented and replied, she really wished they had known to look to faith sooner.

There are many, many people out there looking for something, anything to give them hope, purpose, direction, or guidance—some going from one extreme to another to find it.

If the Konko Faith was to be summed up in one word, it would be balance. Tenchi No Dori, the Ways of the Universe all comes together through balance. Even if you don't have parents (as Michie Sensei did not growing up) or ideal parents, you do have as Konko Sama said, "immortal parents" in Kami Sama with Heaven and Earth who care for and nurture you, are always there, and do not die.

So, thank you Nobuharu Uzunoe Sensei, Michie Uzunoe Sensei for teaching and showing us this balance of faith. I pray we all realize the tremendous blessings we are continuing to receive through your combined virtue, and share this awakening and understanding with those around us who are seeking or in need.



Major Blessings Received by the Church

2017 Aug - Hosted KCNA Conference at Crestview Manor, Corbett, OR. Conferences always take a tremendous amount of work and efforts of people. Every church goes through this, but when we saw this picture (four workshop speakers), we realized how many extra blessings we received to be able to make it happen.

Michie Sensei's arm is wrapped – super sensitive as she was recovering from her stroke a few months earlier.

Andy Sensei's broken leg from work - never went to the doctor so he could keep working to cover extra church expenses

Amy Sensei – KCNA CAM 1st year!
...and all the challenges that come along with it.

Lisa Sensei—struggled with health related depression Had thought, “How am I suppose to create an entire workshop on ‘Smile From Within’ when I can’t even smile myself?”

All of us had major events to overcome and receive blessings for, in order to be able to have a successful conference. Thank you Kami Sama!



2017 KCNA Conference — Crestview Manor



Corbett, Oregon

2018 Apr – Shinto Video created. Introduced by a contact through the Mochitsuki festival, we were requested to help make a video on a personal Shinto experience (fully knowing it wasn't "true" Shinto). Beautifully professionally made. Not only did we not have to pay for it, **they paid us** for our time! We have been able to put it on our website as an explanation to our roots and have received many positive feedback. Later learned that Pearson Education is one of the major producers of higher education institution materials – available to most colleges throughout USA. Wow, thank you Kami Sama! Was at 1.1K views in the first 10 months. Now at 13K views in 2021!

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WZoVEAHHbiQ>



2018 Dec - Rainbow Mochi! While making Okagami Mochi for the church altar for New Year's Day service, was worried about many things: whether we had too much/little mochi for the day, how sales would do, and if the fundraiser would be enough to sustain the church for the year, etc.. Suddenly, Kami sama sent us a rainbow prism message over the mochi (can you see the rainbow colors over the okagami mochi and board?). After seeing this (happened once before during a Grand Ceremony), we were at ease, knowing Kami sama was saying, "Don't worry, everything will turn out well."



And it did. The first day we ended up with over 75lbs extra, but turned out the store needed more than they ordered which we were able to provide due to the extra we had. On the last day, we squeaked by with just enough to fill all the orders, and a few more to give to volunteers in gratitude. Then, there was a call to cancel an order – which was a divine blessing because it turned out it was an order I had written down but not included in the spreadsheet/calculations and did not have ready! Even the extra regulation from the health department to time stamp every batch turned out not to be too difficult to do. Buying a label gun to stamp all the packages, our younger volunteers were fighting over who's turn it was as "it's fun to stamp them!" Truly felt Kami Sama's guidance throughout the fundraiser.

2019 Jan – Church exposure to public. For the first time, our church was asked to be one of three groups covered for the Live TV segment for the Mochitsuki festival. Joining Mochitsuki event 21 years ago, Lisa sensei joined the planning committee over 10 years ago, and the church has been given Presenter status. Along with Michie Sensei, we were able to do a quick demo on how to make mochi. BIG Konko mon on aprons, and even able to have an “Ad” for the church on the JumboTrons during the festival.



2019 Apr - Garden dedication. Through Mochitsuki contacts, we were requested to perform a blessing for a Japanese garden. Turned out it was to be the first healing garden in the nation in a penitentiary.

Working with Rev. Komeji of the Henjyoji Temple, Mr. Hoichi of Kurisu International (designer of Portland Japanese Gardens), and the Oregon State Penitentiary, we were able to perform their Ground Breaking Ceremony.

Thank you Kami Sama for allowing us the opportunity to take part in the beginning of an amazing project that has brought hope and healing to people who have been cut off from almost all elements of nature. There were some who had not seen or touched a tree for over 20 years.



Setting the four corners



Revs. Andrew and Lisa Uzunoe

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tpf4_JgnVnY

Completed garden
Oregon State Penitentiary
Oct 2019



2019 Mar - Smoke, but no fire. The little space heater we've been using for years almost burned down the church. We were there that morning, noticed nothing, but by around 9pm, it was filled down to the floor with thick white smoke. Somehow on high, the unit overheated and dripped oil out that started melting the carpet in a 4-5"



diameter. The intense heat causing scorching which caused the smoke. Left overnight, most likely would have heated enough to spontaneously combust.

Yes, we had to vent the church for a few days. Yes, we had to pay to have the carpet professionally fixed because it's a stretched carpet. We could complain about it, but then we'd miss so many blessings and protection we received to prevent a **major** disaster.

That very morning, when I opened my blinds to say good morning to Kami sama, there was a beautiful red sky and thought "red in the morning, sailor's warning, red at night, sailor's delight!" Funny, today is a beautiful sunny day.

Then saying good morning at my home altar, the Tenchi Kakitsuke was red. What? It was from the reflection of the red balloon we brought home from Saphira's birthday party the night before. Hm, funny.

Then my neighbor's memorial service pamphlet was falling out of my mitama book, Mr. George Storm. But the "Storm" really stood out. Alright, that's three in a row!

So, I texted Andy sensei at 8:12am "Feel there is a storm coming. Not sure of what kind, or when. But just FYI." He texted back "weather or other?" and answered, "If weather maps don't show anything, then storm of another kind I assume. Whatever the case, feel Kami sama giving us a heads up." Made extra prayers that morning for whatever was to come.

This heads up from Kami sama, and the timing of Michie sensei and I to arrive at the same time, as well as timing of the carpet installer allowed us to know that Kami sama was protecting and just as Konko Daijin taught, was "turning major misfortunes to minor ones, and minor ones into none."

Thank you Frank Sunada, for making the arrangements to get the carpet fixed. It was so beautifully done, that we have to search to find the one foot square that was replaced.

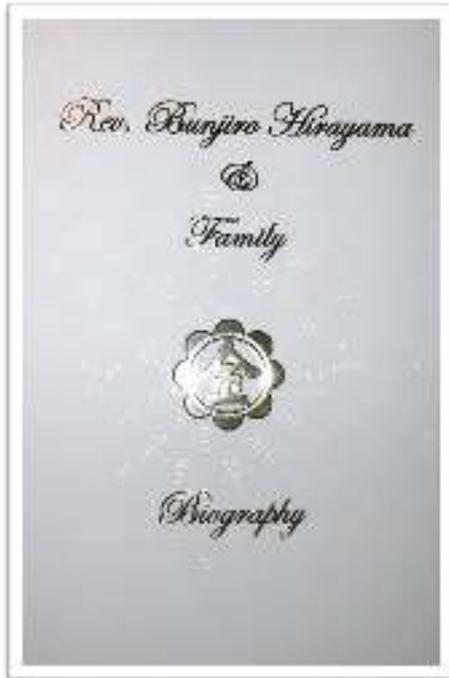
2019 Oct - Rev. Bunjiro Hirayama & Family Biography published

In researching for Rev. Hirayama’s Biography, we found and gathered much lost history. Also, members of Honbu Headquarters were able to find various materials and articles in the Konkokyo Research Center and Konko Library submitted from 1931.

To our surprise, they also found a document called, “Teachings of Rev. Hirayama Bunjiro by Ms. Shizuko Hachiya.” There hadn’t been any recorded teachings of Hirayama Sensei, so this was a tremendous blessing.

We were able to include all of those precious records and photos, along with many more blessings and arrangements of photos and information regarding the founding families in the book we published in October to commemorate Hirayama Sensei’s 50th Memorial Anniversary.

Thank you Kami Sama and Mitama Sama for your guidance!



2020 Aug – Turning Everything Into Blessings.

Riots and unrest in Portland went on for over 100 days in the summer. One of the parks they use for staging was only a block away from the church, but with Kami Sama's blessings, we have been protected from it.

There was one random incident a week or so ago by an angry man - banged on the front door, broke the pamphlet box, bent the mail box, tried to break the light fixtures, kicked open the side door, then broke the church gates on his way out. The surveillance cameras caught it all. So blessed it was 10-15 min before Michie Sensei arrived, so no one was there to get hurt.



Interesting point was that after he kicked the door open, he did not enter the church. The tree was blocking the camera view, but he jumped back and threw his hands up looking and yelling at someone in the church several times before going to the gates (no one was inside).

We are convinced he saw the spirit of the founding Head Minister, Rev. Hirayama, whose protection continues today.

Additionally, Andy Sensei pointed out that the old side door and rusted gates were something we've been needing to replace but didn't have the funds to. But now, insurance will be covering new replacements. The thick side doors (which would have been thrown away because they were dry and worn) were freshly stained only a week prior, so will be repurposed for shed doors!

Blessings continue...A week or so later, the church next door ended up accidentally creating a huge hole in the bushes between our properties when they were trimming and took out a prickly Hawthorne tree. Building a fence in between the two properties was a project that had come up over the years, but funding prevented progress. This hole prompted Dan Jackson to take the lead on the project and donate the materials to build the fence. His negotiations on the property line with the other church resulted in their offering to pay for half!

Thank you to Dan Jackson and family for your donation and organization to build a fence along the entire church line!



2021 Jan - Blessings of protection continue.

On the morning of 1/5, Michie Sensei discovered that the crash she heard at 5:30am and thought was the garbage truck, wasn't. When she went back outside after prayers, it turned out to be a lady who swiped her car into the tree in front of the church and crashed into the neighbor's fence. The lady seemed to be fine and the police and tow truck were there.



At first glance in the dark, the tree seemed ok, just scraped along the bottom where she hit it and a broken branch. But trying to figure out how her small car took so much damage and also broke the upper branch, we realized it wasn't from a direct hit, but from the force of impact.



Upon closer inspection during the day, other parts of the tree were shattered. Cameras showed she was speeding and the tree bending from the impact. Had the tree not been there, she would have crashed through the church bushes, bulletin board, power box, and into the neighbor's house.

Michie Sensei prays for many things, but also specifically for the church property. It's quite amazing how the tire marks run right along it... almost looks like it's perfectly edged!



We are very grateful to Kami Sama, Konko Sama, all of you and our mitama whose prayers continue to protect the church and believers.

This is our 90th Anniversary Year. Michie Sensei always says that anniversary years are ones that strengthen your faith and allow opportunities for great virtue and blessings.

May we have the strength, courage, and faith to receive these as such developmental opportunities.

[The tree survived! Very grateful as it is one of the two that frame the church front with beautiful white flowers in time for the Grand Ceremonies.]

2021 Aug – Preparations for 90th Anniversary, shiny and new.



In preparing for the 90th Anniversary, we re-stained the church building which was overdue for a new coat. Shortly after doing so, we were given another project.

The front bulletin board had been leaning backwards a little bit more each year. But one morning, it had fallen forward completely. Thinking that even a strong wind couldn't propel it forward like that, checking the cameras, sure enough, another disgruntled person had pounded on the church doors, then looked for other things to destroy. Finding the bulletin board rocked, he pushed it down completely, shattering the glass front.



Gratefully, Michie Sensei had just been given a truckload of treated wood for her garden boxes which included 4x4 posts. Using these and salvaging the roof and other parts from the old one, Frank Sunada and Dan Jackson made quick work of it, replacing the glass with a safer plastic one with easier opening doors.

At the same time, in preparation for a Celebration of Life Service for a community member who wanted a video presentation, we needed to mount the projector onto the ceiling. Which meant installing an electrical outlet and then running the cable through the attic down to the community room.

Thank you to everyone who helped for your hard work. Special thanks to Frank & Karen Sunada, and Jackson family for donations of extra stain for the church building, materials for the bulletin board, and projector installation.

We feel Kami Sama is having us fix everything in preparation for the 90th Anniversary... but as we can handle them, one by one.

Kibimai in Portland



Rev. Komatsu Hirayama—lead koto with Ms. Nobuko Moriyasu (Soejima), Ms. Suzuko Matsushita (Hirayama), and Ms. Hisayo Akagi to her right.

Michie Sensei followed along playing the koto when she was younger, but was unable to sing on her own. When she went to seminary, there was a koto teacher who after sitting beside her and singing one phrase, something “clicked” for her and she was able to sing since. This teacher was “Obuchi mama,” as the students called her. Although also a seminary student, she was old enough to be Michie Sensei’s mother, and happened to be the wife of Rev. Michiaki Yoshiki, who was the third son of Fukuoka Church’s Head Minister (they also had been to Portland Church as missionaries). “Obuchi mama” wanted to go to seminary the year before but was unable to, so went the next year. Michie Sensei planned to enter seminary after working two years after graduation to repay her grandmother, but ended up going after just one year as she was to get married and her grandmother passed just 100 days before their wedding. Therefore, they ended up in the same seminary year, 1971-72. “Tsunagarunoga totemo fushigi, sugoi” (The way it came together was so strange/mysterious, amazing).

Once in Portland, Rev. Makoto Yoshiki (wife of Fukuoka’s third Head Minister and Rev. Hirayama’s parent minister) sent several Kibi music and dance tapes from their church. She said it was in gratitude for learning to sing from Komatsu Sensei (in almost the exact same way Michie Sensei did!). Therefore, Michie Sensei now deeply feels it was Rev. Komatsu Hirayama’s virtue that arranged to have her learn before coming to Portland, and her passion for Kibi music and dance continues strongly here.

Nobuko Moriyasu (Soejima)



1941—18 years old

April 20, 1941

Nobuko Moriyasu

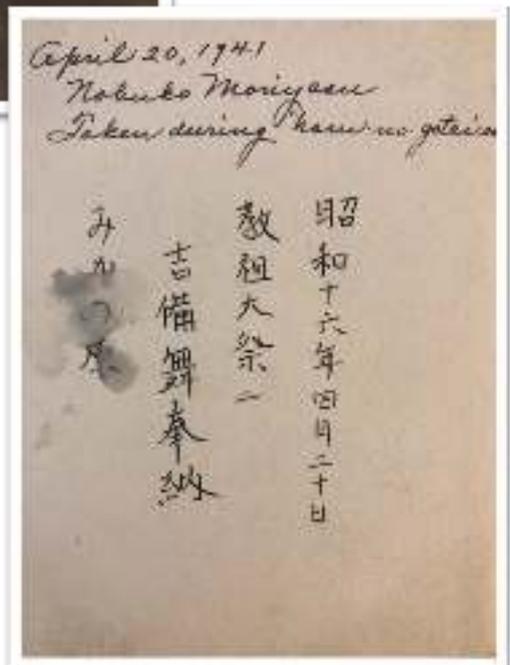
Taken during haru no gotaisai

[Spring Grand Ceremony]

“Kyoso taisai” as written in Kanji is
“Founder’s Grand Ceremony”

Which is the Ikigami Konko Daijin
Grand Ceremony held in Autumn.

Kibimai Song title - Mika no Hara



**Nobuko
Moriyasu**



Performed kibimai, photos yet to be found...
Kazuko Moriyasu, Amy & Lisa Uzunoe

Teresa Uzunoe (Jackson)



Koto: Rev. Michie Uzunoe, Lisa Uzunoe

Erin Akagi (Shelton)



Erin Akagi (Shelton) and Allison Akagi



Miho Uzunoe and Allison Akagi



Madeline Uzunoe-Chin and Emily Jackson



**Performing Kibimai Goyo at Church Anniversaries
Madeline & Emily @ Konko Church of Gardena & Konko Church of Seattle**



Sapphira Jackson



➡ 1st Kibimai



Virtual service during Covid-19
Mask on, Mask off!



Koto: Rev. Michie Uzunoe
Teresa Jackson

Next in the lineup...
Alexia Jackson



Celebrating 70 Years . . .

and many more to come!

Konko Church of Portland

Tenchi Kane No Kami

Grand Ceremony

&

70th Anniversary Celebration

June 3, 2001



HIRAYAMA FAMILY

MORIYASU/SOEJIMA FAMILY

INOUYE FAMILY

AKAGI FAMILY

KUROYE FAMILY

ONISHI/SAITO FAMILY

KUMASAKA/NOJI FAMILY

NAKAMURA/STANSELL FAMILY

UZUNOE/ISHIBASHI FAMILY

BELIEVERS RELATED TO THE CHURCH

CONTENTS

HIRAYAMA FAMILY

The history of the Konko Church of Portland begins with the Hirayama family in Fukuoka, Japan. Mrs. Iso Hirayama was a fervent believer at the Konkokyo Fukuoka Church who was said to have such faith that she was able to tell those who came to her for help, at what hour they would receive blessings. Her faith influenced her son, Bunjiro, who also became a believer of the Fukuoka Church. Developing into a young man with great aspirations, Bunjiro left for America and found work making signs in Seattle.

After some time Mrs. Iso Hirayama arranged Bunjiro's marriage to Komatsu Tanabe. Komatsu was a young lady whose family started at the Amagi Church. There, she learned how to play the Japanese koto and perform the traditional Konkokyo Kibi dance. When her family moved to the Fukuoka Church, Komatsu began teaching the koto and kibi dance to the young ladies and girls at the Fukuoka Church, including Rev. Makoto (who is now a highly respected and renown teacher of the Kibi koto music and dance.) Both Komatsu and his mother came to live with him in Seattle.

As they worked together and spread Konko Daijin's teachings to the Japanese community in the Seattle and Tacoma areas, the scattered Konkokyo believers gathered, and in 1919, Bunjiro Hirayama established the Konko-kyo Association in Seattle. This Association held faith gatherings and services to accommodate the



Mr. & Mrs. Hirayama and followers

needs of the believers from Seattle and Tacoma areas in Washington, and even for those from Portland, Oregon. In 1926, the Konko-kyo Association in Seattle united with another similar group, the Konko-kyo Shinko-kai of Seattle to create the Konko-kyo Seattle Mamichi Kai. This Mamichi Kai came to request and receive an official minister from Konkokyo Headquarters in Japan, and in 1928, the Konko Church of Seattle was established.

At this time, Bunjiro Hirayama was invited by believers in Portland to come propagate there. However, feeling the need to obtain his ministership first, in 1929, Bunjiro Hirayama left for Japan to enter the Konkokyo Seminary. Upon receiving his ordainment in 1930, Rev. Bunjiro Hirayama returned to America, and on April 1, 1931, established the Konko Church of Portland.

Rev. Hirayama's first church was a small family house, located on N.E. Everett Street, near 10th Avenue. The Konko Faith flourished and the church had to relocate twice to accommodate the increase in the number of followers.

To help with propagation, Mrs. Komatsu Hirayama also became ordained as a minister in 1941. However, when World War II broke out, all Japanese leaders, including Rev. Hirayama, were detained and sent to internment camps. During his incarceration at Tule Lake, his mother, Mrs. Iso Hirayama, passed away at the Minidoka Camp in 1944, followed a year later by Rev. Komatsu Hirayama. [We learned later that Rev. Hirayama was granted a transfer to Minidoka due to his mother's illness a month before she passed.]

After the closing of the camps, Rev. Hirayama returned alone to his home in Portland. Many members did not return to Portland, therefore, the size of the congregation dwindled.

With only a few members, Rev. Hirayama made even greater efforts to re-establish the Portland Church. According devoted member Mrs. Shizuko Hachiya's notes, Rev. Hirayama once said, "Even though I am 70 yrs old, when I do Kami's duty, I always feel like a young seventeen-year-old." It was this spirit that allowed Rev. Hirayama to continue.

In 1949, at the age of 69, he purchased property at 1317 N.E. Third Avenue. He had remarried by this time and his new wife, Mrs. Suzuko Hirayama, joined him in his propagation efforts. Through good times and severe hardship, Rev. Hirayama devoted his life to helping people and teaching them how to develop their faith to the end of his life, establishing a firm foundation for the Konko Church of Portland. Rev. Bunjiro Hirayama passed away on September 17, 1969, at the age of 89.



Portland Church at
1317 NE 3rd Avenue

Mrs. Suzuko Hirayama continued to run the church with wholehearted effort after Rev. Hirayama's passing. Even a year later, when she had to be cared for by her eldest daughter, she still continued praying hard for new minister to come and take care the Portland Church from her bed. It was not until after Rev. Isao Goto took Rev. Nobuharu Uzunoe to Mrs. Suzuko's daughter's house following the 1971 Autumn Grand Ceremony, and introduced him as the Portland Church successor, that she was satisfied with her duty fulfilled. Two months later, she passed away very peacefully.

[Rev. Hirayama 5 Year Memorial Service money story - pg. 14]

We know that even to this day, the new church location, new building, and even the new church extension has been supported by all of the Hirayama spirits, as they continue to look after this Konko Church of Portland.

MORIYASU / SOEJIMA FAMILY

PAST

The believers who invited Bunjiro Hirayama to come to Portland to propagate, were Mr. & Mrs. Sukesaburo and Tora Moriyasu. Tora Nakagawa was born and raised in Okayama, Japan, where the Headquarters of Konkokyo is located. Here, she began her faith, and after she finished her training at a nursing school, she married Sukesaburo Moriyasu, who was seeking adventure in America. At the age of 40, Sukesaburo came to the United States of America in 1913, and worked for the Union Pacific Railroad Company. Five years later, he sent for Tora. It didn't take long for Tora to find work as a midwife in Portland, as there were many Japanese people who did not speak English and felt more comfortable with her. Tora continued her faith and prayed devotedly in her new home, however there was no church or minister in Portland until Rev. Bunjiro Hirayama came in search of a believer he had heard was in Portland, Tora Moriyasu. Upon finding her, Rev. Hirayama began making visits to the Moriyasu house in Portland, and Mediated for them.

When the Seattle Church was established, Sukesaburo and Tora Moriyasu invited Rev. Hirayama to stay with them until they could find a house to rent—a place where people could assemble and listen to lectures by Rev. Hirayama. After he settled in, Rev. Hirayama was able to send for his wife and mother to come join him.

Whenever there was a service at the Seattle Church, Mr. & Mrs. Moriyasu took their two daughters by train to attend the services (as long as Mr. Moriyasu worked for Union Pacific, all rides were free). In this way, Mr. Moriyasu gradually started to attend church. Supporting Rev. Hirayama and actively sharing Konko Daijin's teachings within the Japanese community through their occupations and daily lives, Mr. & Mrs. Sukesaburo Moriyasu's efforts sowed the seeds of faith that have blossomed and grow strong even today.

PRESENT

The daughters of the Moriyasu family are Kazuko Rose Eguchi, who resides in Seattle, and Frances Nobuko Soejima, who continues to live in the city of Portland. Frances married Ben Soejima, whose father came from Saga, Japan, and grew up in a logging camp near Vernonia, Oregon. Ben began attending the Konko Church of Portland through the influence of Frances who was active at her church—playing the Japanese Koto and performing the Kibi Dance for church services, which she learned together with Kazuko from Rev. Komatsu Hirayama.

DESIRES FOR FAMILY IN FUTURE

"My children frequently take rides on the airplane either for work or pleasure. I like to know where and when so I can pray for their safety. I am grateful that I could pray for them. I was overwhelmed to have one accept goshinmai [sacred rice paper], he takes it in his suitcase. So in one sense, I believe they realize the importance of Kami Sama. I would like to see my children going to the Konko Faith."

"The children have had a briefing about the Konko Religion so the children have been exposed to some of the Konko Way and will accept their ways, but they know so little about the religion. I feel so inadequate and guilty about not being able to be a role model for the children. When they get older, I hope they would try the Konko Way. You go to church to learn how to pray to Kami Sama. If you have a bigger, serious problem, Rev. Uzunoe is there to pray with you or for you. To me the Konko Religion teaches you how happy life can be for you." –Mrs. Frances Soejima



Mr. & Mrs. Nobuko & Ben Soejima with family
Funatake, Watanabe, Naemura Families

INOUYE FAMILY

PAST

Succeeding his father's business that included a bath house, restaurant, hotel, and laundry, Sugao Inouye settled and married Sameko Akamatsu. The Mikado Hotel they owned stood in the heart of old Japan Town in Portland, close to where Bunjiro Hirayama was beginning his propagation in 1930. Whether Bunjiro Hirayama came around to propagate at their doors first, or whether Tora Moriyasu, who delivered their children, came to introduce Bunjiro Hirayama to them is unclear. However, Rev. Hirayama's influence and faith eventually led Sugao Inouye to become a Hokkyo member (assistant to the church Head Minister) where he donned the ceremonial robes to perform services with Rev. Hirayama.

Mr. & Mrs. Sugao Inouye had four children: Chizuko, Kiyoko, Jerry, and George, respectively. Mr. & Mrs. Inouye diligently took their children—Mr. Inouye especially took his son Jerry—to church, leaving in them a deep impression of faith that carried on into their adult lives. (George had passed away at an early age of four.)

Chizuko, the eldest daughter, learned how to play the Koto from Mrs. Moriyasu and performed in the church services. She moved to Japan when she married, and continued her faith there.

Kiyoko also had a Konkokyo wedding, and encouraged by her parents, made a pilgrimage to the Konkokyo Headquarters in Japan with her husband to give thanks to Konko Sama.

Jerry became a devoted believer who continued his faith after his father. He became one of the critical supports of the Portland Church, especially right after the war when many believers did not return. Active in the Japanese community, Jerry broadened the scope and range of the Portland Church through his activities, and represented the Konko Church in various social groups. In a newsletter article, he wrote, "I'm proud to be a firm believer of the Konko Faith. Our family is one of the few who have worshipped the Konko Religion since its inception here in Portland in 1931. I was only 10 years old at that time, but I can still recall attending the services conducted by the late Rev. Bunjiro Hirayama with my parent and sisters. We began to learn about the Konko Faith and its divine blessings...." Jerry married Grace Kuranishi in 1947, and had four children: Karen, Donna, Sherrie, and Kurtis.

Each time the Portland Church moved, Jerry Inouye was there to support and help where he could. Most of the history of this church was documented by Jerry, as he fulfilled the much needed role of the church Konko Review reporter, and the Portland Church congregation president for many years.

Jerry held firmly to his faith, and just as our Founder taught us, he "Pray[ed] even at the moment of death..." as he passed away with the prayer book held tightly in his hands. He had always said, "Doing goyo [church duties] brings blessings," and sure enough Jerry received the greatest blessing when he passed away on December 28, 2000—he passed away happy and fulfilled, knowing that he had been well taken care of and appreciated by his loving family, and that all of his family members were present to see him off. We know his spirit continues to work for and support us, as his eldest daughter saw his figure in her room, comforting her with a smile.

PRESENT

Kurtis Inouye, taken to church by Jerry just as Jerry's father used to take him, continues to attend the Portland Church. "Everyday I know I am receiving divine blessings. I have a wonderful life, a great career with Waddrell & Reed –helping people achieve their financial goals, and a loving family." Receiving many more blessings that are keeping him busy, Kurtis still finds time to succeed his father, fulfilling the role of the President of the Portland Church congregation.

DESIRES FOR FAMILY IN FUTURE

"I know my father wanted all of his kids to practice faith and come to church. I know he was saying to Sensei [Rev. Nobuharu Uzunoe] right before he died, that he wanted and wished for my sisters to come to church. That's what his desire was." --Kurtis Inouye



Jerry (in yellow sweater) with family
Inouye, Sunada, Akagi, Sparrman Families

AKAGI FAMILY

PAST

Hisayo Akagi and her husband, Kitaro Akagi, emigrated from Sayama, Okayama to Portland, Oregon. They raised a family of four boys. When her sons were still young, Mrs. Akagi came down with pneumonia. It was during this illness that she was first introduced to the Konko Faith by Mr. and Mrs. Moriyasu. She met Rev. Bunjiro Hirayama, and her faith blossomed. Walking one-and-a-half hours to church everyday for morning services, Mrs. Akagi became one of the strongest and steadfast believers of the Konko Faith in Portland.

When Rev. Hirayama passed away in 1969, there was no minister to succeed the Portland Church. Rev. Yuasa came once a month from Seattle to Portland to officiate monthly services. However, this was a short-term plan, and the KCNA felt that there was no choice but to merge the Portland Church with Seattle Church.

Determined, Mrs. Akagi adamantly opposed this idea, and was persistent in her beliefs that Tenchi Kane No Kami would find a minister and, therefore, that the Portland Church should remain independent. Mrs. Akagi, together with her her eldest son, Minoru, tended to the church every day until their prayers were answered, and Rev. and Mrs. Nobuharu Uzunoe came to Portland in May of 1972.

Minoru Akagi, devoted to the church just as his mother, was a warm and sincere man. He married Shizu Nigo on September 7, 1947, and together raised two sons, Raymond and Randy, and a daughter, Linda.

PRESENT

It was not until after Minoru passed away just before the church's 50th Anniversary, however, that Shizu became a devout Konko Faith believer. She wakes up early everyday, and drives to church for morning service. Her prayers are strong and sincere, and she spends many hours volunteering her time at the church.

Randy and Linda still attend church today. Randy married Tomi Takeda—daughter of Reverends Shiro and Sadako Takeda, and granddaughter of Reverends Isao and Tomoyo Goto of the Gardena Church. They have two daughters, Erin and Allison—fourth generation Konko Faith believers. All are active members of the Portland Church.

DESIRES FOR FAMILY IN FUTURE

Shizu Akagi seeks Toritsugi daily, and always prays for her children and grandchildren, for their health, and success in school and work. It is her wish that all of her family members (present and future) be Konko believers and perform “goyo.”

DESIRES FOR CHURCH IN FUTURE

Shizu Akagi hopes that the church will continue to see growth in the future, and that church members—whether the congregation is small or large—will develop a strong and sincere faith.



Shizu with Akagi Family

KUROYE FAMILY

At age 29, Miss. Eiko Sata left Japan in 1955 in search of adventure and explore the United States. Six months after her arrival, she felt quite alone in a strange country. Yearning for emotional and mental guidance, Eiko began to search for a church to belong to. She befriended her neighbor, Mrs. Hisayo Akagi, who became a mother figure to her. During her visits with Mrs. Akagi, Eiko would see Reverend Bunjiro Hirayama, who stopped by Mrs. Akagi's home from time to time.

It wasn't until later that Mrs. Akagi formally introduced Eiko to Rev. Hirayama and the Konkko Church. The first time she felt the need to go to church was to pray for a specific wish--to recover from an illness and to become physically healthy. She recalls Rev. Hirayama telling her, "Let's pray together for one week." Receiving blessings within that week, Eiko was deeply grateful to Kami. Because of this experience, she has been a firm believer in Konkokyo. In 1963, Eiko married Mr. Fumio Kuroye.

Fumio Kuroye's parents, who made their living as farmers growing vegetables and berries in Oregon, had been Konkokyo believers in Okayama, Japan. Although he attended church as a child, Fumi's relationship with the church grew weaker as he grew older. It was not until he met Eiko, that he would rediscover Konkokyo. Fumio would occasionally tag along with Eiko on her visits to Mrs. Akagi. At first, when Eiko wanted to go to church, Fumio would just drop her off at the entrance and wait for her. However, one day, a church member invited him to come in and join them for coffee. He accepted because it was cold outside. This continued many times before he eventually started coming to services.

Mr. & Mrs. Fumio Kuroye have been strong supporters of the Portland Church ever since; with the exception during the years between 1942 and 1945, when they were taken to the relocation camps. First they were taken to the Minedoka Relocation Camp in Idaho, and then relocated again to where Jerry Inouye, and Ben Soejima were, in Oregon.

Currently, Mr. & Mrs. Fumio Kuroye devotedly come to Church most every morning, but on the days Fumio works, they come in the evening. As senior members of the church they provide the younger generations with information about the church history and stories of blessings. In addition, anytime anyone at the Church needs help with their cars, they know they can go to Fumio who is always willing to assist in any way that he can!



ONISHI / SAITO FAMILY

Miss. Masuko Toyama, who lived in Okayama, Japan, married Mr. Kyuske Onishi, who was planning to go to school in America. After arriving in Portland and finding it difficult to receive and afford the education he sought, Mr. Onishi began working for the SP&S (Seattle, Portland & Spokane) Railway (now the Great Northern Pacific Railway, NP).

Mrs. Masuko Onishi became good friends with Mrs. Tora Moriyasu, who was also from Okayama and helped deliver her seven children. Although it is not clear whether Mrs. Onishi was guided by Tora Moriyasu to the Faith, she is said to have highly respected her. Realizing blessings, Mrs. Onishi came to feel the gratefulness of the Konko Faith, and became a believer.

Mr. & Mrs. Onishi was advised by a doctor to take their first daughter, Hisako, back to Japan because of her weak condition. Mrs. Onishi took Hisako back to Japan, but when Hisako's condition did not improve after two years, Mrs. Onishi's mother took Hisako in and encouraged her to return home. Having six more children, Mrs. Onishi continued to go to the Konko Church to seek Mediation from Rev. Bunjiro Hirayama.

When the conditions in Japan changed due to preliminary events leading to World War II, Mr. Onishi, concerned for Hisako, called her home in 1937. In Portland, Hisako met Mr. Shiki Saito and had a Konkokyo wedding by Rev. Bunjiro Hirayama. They had one daughter and one son, Carrie and Norio, and have been living in Portland ever since.



Mrs. Hisako Saito (middle) with friend, and daughter, Carrie (left)

KUMASAKA / NOJI FAMILY

Mr. Jyuji Kumasaka was one of seven children brought to America by his father. Settling in the Seattle area, they were told this was to be their new home. In his late teens, Mr. Jyuji Kumasaka went to find work in Tacoma. There, he met his wife, Kuniko Takaki. Their encounter with Konkokyo came when they were faced with the possible loss of their first-born daughter, Ruby.

Because she was born prematurely, Ruby's life was dangerously at risk. The Kumasakas were encouraged by friends to seek assistance from the minister at the Konko Church of Tacoma. With the guidance of the minister and her parents' earnest prayers, Ruby was able to survive and grow up healthy. Because of the blessings they received, Mr. and Mrs. Kumasaka, as well as Mrs. Kumasaka's mother, Isono Takaki, became Konkokyo believers.

Ruby moved to Rochester, New York to attend college, and then went to Seattle for graduate school, where she met Harold Noji. Married in 1953 in Los Angeles by Rev. Tsuyuki, they raised a family of one daughter and two sons. Over the years the Nojis moved from place to place. Most of the time there was no Konko Church, so Ruby went to Christian churches to pray.

Returning to the Northwest, they lived in the city of Beaverton until their children left for college. Then, Mr. and Mrs. Noji (Harold and Ruby) moved to West Linn, where they continue to reside. With a Konko Church within range once again, Ruby, together with her husband, Harold, attend the Konko Church of Portland.

"With grown children scattered across our country, I pray that one day they too, will rediscover Kami-sama. All three, nurtured during childhood by grandparents and parents, were attending church. It is my prayer that one day, they will rediscover the blessing of Kami-sama. In the April, 2001 Konko Church Newsletter, Uzunoe Sensei has included the following:

'The descendants of those who listen to Konko Daijin's words and practice faith will live without worry. Teaching your children how to live without worry is practicing true faith. (GI: Yamamoto Sadajiro, 68:1)'"

—Ruby Noji

Mr. & Mrs. Harold Noji with second son



NAKAMURA / STANSELL FAMILY

Mrs. Kameo Nakamura became a Konko believer at the Konko Missions of Honolulu, Hawaii. She passed her faith down to her daughters, Rose and Lilian. Rose, now Mrs. Rose Sugai, remained in Hawaii, and currently continues to attend the Honolulu Church. Lilian met Louis Stansell, who was stationed in Hawaii at the time, and after some traveling, they got married in Tijuana, Mexico. Retiring from his service in the Navy in 1975, Mr. & Mrs. Stansell moved to Portland, Oregon. When they first arrived, they attended the only Konko Church their family knew of that existed in their area at the time--the Seattle Church. Later, finding out there was a Konko Church in their home city of Portland, they began attending the Portland Church, and continue to do so today.

Lilian Stansell attends church because she believes in Kami Sama. "Ever since I was little, my mother would talk about Kami Sama. It stayed in my mind. I was the only Japanese at my school who had to walk instead of take the bus, it was a very long way home. When I told mother I believed in Kami Sama, she said he'd protect me."

Louis Stansell began going to the Konko Church through the influence of Lilian. He says he attends church because, "It strengthens your faith. Also for the fellowship of the members and support they give you...you can share experiences. Then, there is that stronger feeling of 'there's someone out there that's going to help you.' Whether you have problems or don't have problems, the fellowship will support you. Your family supports you too, but it's a very different kind of support. We are staying healthy and continuing to enjoy life."

Mr. & Mrs. Stansell, who have four children and seven—going on eight—grandchildren, start their mornings by turning the page in their calendar that has a teaching written for each day. They turn the page when praying, read the teaching together, and use it as a guide throughout the day.



Mr. & Mrs. Louis Stansell (right) with family

UZUNOE / ISHIBASHI FAMILY

Sent to America by their parent minister just after getting married, Rev. Nobuharu Uzunoe, at the age of 23, began his training at the Konko Church of Hollywood (now Gardena) under Rev. Isao Goto in 1971, while Mrs. Michie Uzunoe, age 19 at the time, entered the Konko Seminary. When Rev. Michie joined Rev. Nobuharu in Hollywood a year later, they were both sent off again, this time by Rev. Goto, to the Portland Church. Young and inexperienced in a new country without being able to speak or understand English, Revs. Nobuharu and Michie Uzunoe only had the faith their families passed on to them, to give them hope and continue on with their goyo.

Nobuharu's faith has deep roots beginning three generations ago in a Konko Church in Sasebo, Japan. Developing and growing stronger with each generation, Nobuharu's father, Nobuyasu, became one of the church elders, while Nobuharu's mother, Teru, came from the Okamoto family—another family with a long history in the Konko Faith. With both parents firmly grounded in faith, Nobuharu, the eldest of four children, had been brought up with good role models and strict discipline, and was taught at an early age to have a very high respect for the church, its role, and its ministers.

The Uzunoe family's introduction to the Tsurunominato Church (in Nagasaki), came through Nobuharu's aunt, Tsuruko, who happened to run into the church while visiting Nagasaki. Coming home, she informed her family of the church and of the head minister, Rev. Sue Kajiwara's, teachings. Nobuyasu, hearing this, began attending the Tsurunominato Church once a month, taking Nobuharu with him when he became old enough. There was also a believer in Sasebo at the time, Mrs. Katagiri, who became strong in faith through Rev. Kajiwara. Mrs. Katagiri prayed fervently and helped many people who came to her home. Nobuyasu went to listen to Mrs. Katagiri's teachings whenever he could. Through the experiences with his father, Nobuharu grew up wanting to be helpful and useful to his society—a farming society. After high school he tried to pursue this desire through learning about agriculture, but when this did not work out, Rev. Kajiwara told him that there were other ways of helping people, and suggested becoming a minister. Having seen Rev. Kajiwara's profound faith and many times seeing the miracles she performed for believers while he was at church, Nobuharu decided to become a trainee under her in Tsurunominato. In this way the entire Uzunoe family gradually migrated to the Tsurunominato Church.

Mitsunobu, Nobuharu's younger brother, continues the Uzunoe family's faith there even today. Nobuharu's aunt, Masae, also continues the faith in her family as Mrs. Nakachi—as a wife, mother, and grandmother in Hawaii.



Teru & Nobuyasu Uzunoe

The Ishibashi family also has a long history of Konko believers. Michie's faith history begins with Shima Ishibashi, three generations ago. In the city of Hue, Japan, a Rev. Takasaki began propagating with nothing but an altar made out of an empty mandarin orange crate turned up side down, and a copy of the Divine Reminder. Passing by, Shima Ishibashi stopped when she realized what he was doing, and offered to help in any way she could. She began bringing him food and offerings, and eventually, Rev. Takasaki came to establish the Hue Church. Shima's children saw and continued her faith. Toyo, Shima's daughter-in-law, went to church with her, but it was not until after she fell ill after giving birth to her sixth son, slipped into a coma for a week, and was saved through Masako (Shima's daughter's) prayers that she began practicing faith on her own. Then, after hearing about Mrs. Katagiri in Sasebo, she went often to listen to her faith stories and teachings. Here, she met and became acquainted with Nobuyasu Uzunoe.

Economically stressed after World War II, Toyo, who was strong willed and tough inside and out, strove hard through mountains of hardships to provide for her family and live according to the teachings. When Toyo's daughter, Reiko, gave birth to a girl and soon after became blind, it was through Mrs. Katagiri's efforts that arrangements were made so Reiko could be cared for at the Tsurunominato Church. Although told by doctors she would never see again, Reiko regained her eyesight exactly 10 years after entering the



Toyo Ishibashi

church. Meanwhile, Toyo raised Michie as her own child, taking her to church and faith gatherings whenever possible. When Michie was about eight years old, the Ishibashi family, through the guidance of their ancestor's spirit, moved to the Tsurunominato Church in Nagasaki. Going to school by day, and helping her grandmother run her restaurant booth (oden yatai) by night to get by, Michie quickly learned how important faith was. She recalls how her grandmother, even when they didn't have enough to eat, would put aside money to make offerings to the church, and always gave to others what she had without a second thought.

Michie saw how faith gave her grandmother the strength and courage to carry on in life with a generous and caring heart. Although seeing the suffering and hardship her grandmother endured, Michie decided she would practice the Konko Faith because of the fact that the Founder, Konko Daijin, was allowed to train within the home. In many religions, the founder or the disciples are taken to a solitary place away from their families to be trained. Because Michie believed that faith should bring the family together—not pull it apart—the Founder's example appealed to her. She thought, "If this is the way of this faith, I will go with it." Becoming active at her church, Michie

often worked with Nobuharu during church duties and youth camping trips. When Michie was nineteen, her parent minister, Rev. Kajiwara, encouraged her to marry Nobuharu Uzunoe to have a happy and struggle-free life.

When Rev. Isao Goto, Head Minister of the Konko Church of Hollywood went on a package tour of Japan, one of the believers of the Tsurunominato Church—who found out through his work that a minister from America was coming—invited and arranged Rev. Goto to speak at his church. Meeting for the first time, Rev. Goto and Rev. Kajiwara’s understanding and profound reverence for Kami’s virtue allowed them to connect spiritually. Deeply indebted and grateful to Rev. Goto for making the extra time to speak at her church, after he returned to America, Rev. Kajiwara sent him a ship carved out of tortoise shell, carried by Nobuharu Uzunoe (it is still displayed there today). In need of a young minister (ideally a couple) to help with propagation in America and run the Konko Church of Portland, Rev. Goto asked Rev. Kajiwara for one of her trainees. Thus, getting married to Michie Ishibashi on May 2, 1971, Nobuharu Uzunoe left for America ten days later, beginning their experience in America.

Running the Portland Church and raising four girls: Amy, Lisa, Teresa, and Miho, with nothing but hard work and faith, Revs. Nobuharu and Michie Uzunoe have shown the believers and their own children what faith can achieve. Deeply respecting and inspired by her parents, Amy, following their example, entered the Konko Seminary and received her ordainment as a minister in 1997. Now, married to William Chin, they have one daughter, Madeline. Introduced to the Faith through Lisa, Andrew Davis—seeing the blessings and divine arrangements occurring at the Portland Church—took the Uzunoe name, married Lisa, and together, left to study and train at the Konko Headquarters. They have just received their ordainment on May 8th, 2001. Teresa married Daniel (Dan) Jackson in 1997, and with one son, Daniel, Jr., they help the Portland Church with its many duties. Dan hopes to pursue the ministry someday, too. Miho, still in high school, helps with church duties where she can, and although she doesn’t want to become a minister, her parents’ desire of helping people run strong in her blood as well.

Revs. Nobuharu and Michie Uzunoe pray they can hand down to their children and descendants, the faith and virtue they received from their ancestors that brought them the happiness they have today.

**The tortoise shell ship that
“brought Nobuharu Uzunoe
Sensei to America.”**



**Revs. Nobuharu & Michie Uzunoe
with Family**



**Rev. Reiko Ishibashi (seated)
Uzunoe, Chin, Jackson Families**

BELIEVERS RELATED TO THE PORTLAND CHURCH

Revs. Yomisu and Hideko Oya – Meeting Rev. Nobuharu at PSU, Yomisu Oya was curious then impressed by the Konko Faith. Learning more through Toritsugi, he became a minister at the Portland Church. His wife, Hideko, also became a minister, and together, with their three children, Yoshie, Chika, and Shin, they currently run the Konko Church of Sacramento. Rev. Yomisu Oya is also presently the KCNA Chief Administrative Minister (CAM).

Michele Fukawa – Attending the Konko Missions in Honolulu through the influence of her mother, when Michele came to Portland to study, she began attending the Portland Church. Pursuing her desire to help others, she currently works for the county—with people and families in need of assistance—and also volunteers time at the Portland Church.

Takeuchi Family – Revs. Masanori and Kanako Takeuchi of the Airaku Church, came to the Portland Church to train for two years. Through blessings, they have been able to open the Chicago Propagation Hall, and are currently continuing their mission in Chicago with their two children, Hiroko and Mitsunori.

Nakahara Family – Revs. Hironobu and Matsuko Nakahara of the Airaku Church, with their two children, Kazumichi and Hiroko, trained at the Portland Church for two-and-a-half years. Just last year, the Nakahara Family has moved to Seattle to help Revs. Michihiro and Kisa Yuasa with the Seattle Church.

Rev. & Mrs. Richard and Miyako Dusek – Arriving in April, 2001, Rev. Dick and Miya from the Airaku Church has come to train at the Portland Church for the next couple of years. After his teaching career and raising their four children, they join KCNA hoping to study, train, and help propagate the Konko Faith ever more broadly and deeply into the American Society.

Hamada Family

Hamlin Family

Kondo/Nakayama Family

Akiyama Family

Abe Family

Hachiya Family

PORTLAND CHURCH HISTORY

- 1903 Jun 19 Bunjiro Hirayama landed in the Port of Tacoma
- 1910 **Started faith gatherings** at Ms. Yayoi Mitsumori's hotel
- 1914Apr Bunjiro Hirayama returned to Fukuoka for training
- 1916 Jan Bunjiro Hirayama comes back to Seattle
- 1919 Feb Bunjiro & Komatsu Hirayama established the Konko Kyo Association in Seattle
- 1920 Bunjiro Hirayama seeks member in Portland (Moriyasu)
Portland propagation begins
- 1926 Hirayama's Konko Kyo Association in Seattle was combined with Ueda's Konko Kyo Shinto Kai to form Konko Kyo Seattle Mamichikai
- 1928 Aug Konko Church of Seattle established by Rev. Hideshima
- 1930 May 31 **Rev. Bunjiro Hirayama ordained as Konkokyo minister**
- 1931 April 1 Rev. Bunjiro Hirayama Established the Konko Church of Portland 909 NW Everett St.**
Sep 14 Church moved to 53 NE Holiday St.
- 1938 May 1 Church moved to 122 NE 3rd St.
- 1941 Jun 24 **Rev. Komatsu Hirayama ordained as Konkokyo minister**
Dec 7 **Church closed by US government**
Rev. Bunjiro Hirayama detained, interned at Tule Lake
Family and many believers interned at Minidoka
- 1944 Jan Mrs. Iso Hirayama passed away in Camp Jan
- 1945 Jul Rev. Komatsu Hirayama passed away in Camp Jul
- 1949 **Rev. Bunjiro Hirayama Re-establishes Church at 1317 NE 3rd Ave** (at 69 years old)

- 1949 Apr Married Mrs. Suzuko Matsushita
- 1959 Jun 5 Rev. Michiaki Yoshiki came for missionary work from Fukoka Church
- 1962 Oct Rev. Michiaki Yoshiki returns to Fukuoka Church
- 1969 Sep 17 **Rev. Bunjiro Hirayama passed away at age 89**
Church without Head Minister
Rev. Michihiro Yuasa (Seattle HM) began coming once a month to perform services
- 1972 Jan 15 **Mrs. Suzuko Hirayama passed away**
May 17 **Rev. Isao Goto becomes Deputy Head Minister**
May **Rev. Nobuharu Uzunoe comes to Portland Church as the official successor**
- 1973 May 8 **Rev. Michie Uzunoe ordained as Konkokyo minister**
- 1974 May 18 **Rev. Reiko Ishibashi transfers to Portland from Japan**
- 1975 Jan 7 **Rev. Nobuharu Uzunoe becomes Assist. Head Minister**
- 1976 Oct 2 **Rev. Nobuharu Uzunoe succeeds as the**
Oct **2nd Head Minister of the Konko Church of Portland**
First Mochi machine purchased
- 1980 Oct **Property on 1330 SE 92nd Ave purchased**
- 1981 Jun 21 50th Anniversary Celebration** (Cosmopolitan Hotel)
- 1982 Aug Hosted KCNA Conference (Suttle Lake, OR)
Oct Church moved to new site, construction started
- 1983 Jan Finished parking lot payment, all payments completed
May I-205 Freeway opens
May **New Church Dedication at Spring Grand Ceremony**
Oct Pilgrimage to Gohonbu - 100th Anniv of Independence
- 1984 Mar 30 **Rev. Yomisu Oya ordained as minister at Portland**

- 1985 Jan Rev. Nobuharu Uzunoe Assist. CAM (Rev. Yuasa CAM)
Dec 1st Mochitsuki to Anzen Import Store (6 machines)
- 1988 Jan Saturday Mochitsuki started
May Church basketball at gym every Friday started
- 1989 Jan **Rev. Nobuharu Uzunoe KCNA CAM goyo start (8 yrs)**
Jul Ended - Neighbor Fair changed to 3 days
- 1991 May 60th Anniversary Celebration**
Amy Uzunoe - Kibimai
Dec 7th Mochitsuki (1,700 lbs – peak)
- 1992 Apr Andrew Davis (Uzunoe) attends service for the first time
Jul Erin Akagi start Kibimai practice
Oct 22 **Rev. Hideko Oya ordained as minister at Portland**
Nov 25 Revs. Yomisu & Hideko transfer to Sacramento Church
Rev. Yomisu becomes Head Minister of Sacramento
- 1993 Aug 8 Booth at Oregon Historical Museum - Coney hot dogs
Aug 27-29 Hosted KCNA Conference (Menucha in Corbett, OR)
- 1994 Mar Constructed church fence (back yard)
Mar 6 Allison Akagi and Miho Uzunoe – Kibimai practice start
Mar Revs. Uzunoe to Mazatlan, Mexico (Shintokai present)
Aug 12 **Revs. Wakiko Igawa & Mako Ota transfer from Fukuzaki**
Oct 10 **Revs. Masanori & Kanako Takeuchi transfer from Airaku Church** for training. Children - Hiroko, Mitsunori
- 1996 Oct 18 **Rev. Michie Uzunoe becomes Assistant Head Minister**
- 1997 Jun 10 **Rev. Amy Uzunoe ordained as minister at Portland**
Sep **Revs. Masanori & Kanako open Chicago Propagation Hall - Dedication Service**
- 1998 Apr 16 **Revs. Hironobu & Matsuko Nakahara transfer from Airaku Church** for training. Children - Kazumichi, Hiroko
Aug 22 **Rev. Kiyoshi Igawa ordained as minister at Portland**
- 1999 Nov 18 **Rev. Wakiko Igawa establishes Whitter-Rose Hill Church (Becomes Head Minister) Revs. Igawa and Ota to WRH**

- 2000 Mar Community Hall construction begins
 May 7 **Community Hall Dedication Service**
 Oct 10 **Rev. Hironobu & Matsuko Nakahara transfers to Seattle**
 Oct **Revs. Igawa establish Whittier-Rose Hill Church**
- 2001 Apr 17 **Rev. Richard & Miyako Dusek transfer from Airaku Church**
 May 8 **Revs. Andrew & Lisa Uzunoe ordained ministers at Ptld**
 Rev. Andrew Uzunoe becomes ONLC board member (3 yrs)
Jun 3 70th Anniversary Celebration
 Jun 30 **Rev. Nobuharu Uzunoe transfers to Gardena Church**
(Becomes Head Minister of Gardena)
 Jul JAS honors Jerry - Jerry Inouye Memorial Golf Tournament
 Oct Pilgrimage to Gohonbu, and Fukuoka 110th Anniversary
- 2002 Jun 27 **Rev. Michie Uzunoe succeeds as the 3rd Head Minister**
of the Konko Church of Portland
- 2003 Feb 3 PCC Mochitsuki—sold mochi for the first time
 Rev. Amy Uzunoe-Chin Youth Program Director
 Jun 27-29 Sunday School church camping started (Florence, OR)
- 2004 May 27 **Rev. Andrew Uzunoe becomes Assistant Head Minister**
 Aug 29 **Rev. Richard & Miyako Dusek open Tacoma Fellowship**
- 2005 Jul Rev. Andrew Uzunoe wins Jerry Inouye Golf Tournament
 Aug Hosted KCNA & KMH Joint Conference (Camp Angelos)
- 2006 Apr 2 75th Anniversary Celebration**
- 2008 May 30 Richmond Elem. School Spring Festival, sold mochi
 Oct 11 Church golf tournament started
 Oct Sunday School field trips and Halloween party started
 Nov 22 Line Dancing lessons at church started
 12/13 Holiday charity potluck party— for foster children
- 2010 Jan Rev. Michie Uzunoe started MWSS Chairperson (8 yrs)
 May Started Mother’s Day Rose sale to kids for 50 cents
- 2010 Dec 18 **Rev. Andrew Uzunoe succeeds as the 4th Head Minister**
of the Konko Church of Portland

2011		Rev. Michie Uzunoe became Nikkei Fujinkai President (current)
	Apr 3	80th Anniversary Celebration (Airport Embassy Suites)
	Nov 3	Fukuoka 120 th Anniversary – Rev. Andrew attended
	Nov 24	Tsurunominato 90 th Anniversary - Rev. Michie attended
2013	Jan	Rev. Amy Uzunoe-Chin became KCNA Assistant CAM
	Jun	KIC London gathering, Rev. Lisa Uzunoe join/officiated
	Jun	Church Fishing club started: deep sea and fly fishing/tying
2014	Aug	Rev. Lisa Uzunoe became Mochitsuki Chairperson (current)
	Sep	Anzen closed. Mochi contract signed with Uwajimaya
2015	Jun	KIC London gathering, Rev. Amy Uzunoe-Chin officiated
	Mar	Konko Spirit Website launch
2017	Jan	Rev. Amy Uzunoe-Chin became KCNA CAM (current)
	Jan	Rev. Lisa Uzunoe, Faith Training Division Director (2 yrs)
	Aug	Hosted KCNA Conference (Crestview in Corbett)
2018	Jan	Rev. Andrew Uzunoe, became MBR Vice Chair (2 yrs)
	Apr	Shinto Video with church published by Pearson Education
2019	Sep	Heating/cooling unit for hiromae installed
	Oct 6	Rev. Bunjiro Hirayama 50 Year Memorial Service
		Commemorative Hirayama Biography Published
	Nov	Pilgrimage to Honbu for 160 th Anniversary of Establishment
2020	Jan 26	1 st Hatsumode experience at PSU Viking Pavillion
	Mar	Covid-19 Worldwide Pandemic Government orders churches to close Portland continues to hold services
	May 25	Hosted Independent Memorial Day Service during Covid
	Jun	Closures deemed unconstitutional President orders churches reopened
	Dec	Rev. Andrew Uzunoe became MBR Chair (current)
2021	Jan 1	1 st Virtual Hatsumode video/activity released, Mochitsuki
	Apr 4	1 st Zoom Grand Ceremony (90 th Anniv. postponed to Oct)
	Apr 11	Tacoma Fellowship 15 Year Anniversary Ceremony
	Sep	90 th Book published <u>Receive Blessings People Can See</u>
	Oct 3	90th Anniversary Celebration (Virtual from Portland Church)

90th Anniversary Virtual Ceremony



Thank you everyone for joining us virtually!

We would love to include your faith stories in our next book. Therefore, let us all "Receive blessings people can see," and look forward to seeing you in person for the 100th Anniversary with joy and gratitude!

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Domo arigatogozaimashita