

*Monthly Service at Konkō Church of Chicago July 18, 2021*

Good morning, everyone! Happy New Day, Week & special *Thanks* for joining us today. This is our monthly service for July, 2021. I trust you are all enjoying the best of health & excellent spirits on this beautiful early summer day.

Through today's monthly service we would like to extend our appreciation to Alex & Lanna for everything they have done for our church.

They will move to Lake Forest in California Aug. 3. They bought a new house there and Lanna's mother, Katsuko-san will live together with them. It was a good decision for the three of them and we will pray for their success in the future and that Kami's wish for them to be fulfilled.

Alex found a job in Chicago in May 2014, 7 years ago. Hiroko, our daughter surprisingly happened to see him at the Mitsuwa market place soon after he moved. Since then Alex has kindly joined us at our services almost every Sunday.

Lanna was engaged to Alex 5 years ago. At that time I thought Alex would move to California. However, to our great pleasure Lanna moved to Chicago in July 2017 to live together with Alex for a while. Since then, they have joined us in almost all services and sought Mediation with me.

Our older son, Mitsunori, got to know Alex when he joined the Youth Camp at age 13. Alex & Mitsunori have been good friends in the faith since then. Mitsunori has also tried to join us in services since then. Lanna & Hiroko have been good friends since they were teenagers.

We all got together for a picnic near the lake in September 2017. It was certainly a lot of fun.

In retrospect, I think Kami has miraculously arranged everything for KC Chicago. Alex & Lanna had their wedding ceremony in July 2019, 2 years ago here in Chicago. Alex's parents flew in from Hawaii and Lanna's mother came from California. Rev. Nobuharu Uzunoe, head-minister of KC Gardena, officiated their wedding ceremony and I assisted. All of my family members were invited, and so enjoyed the memorable occasion.

The most epoch-making event was hosting the KCNA Conference in Chicago for the first time, with KC Toronto co-host in August 2018. Around 100 believers attended this conference from all over the USA and Canada. It was a great success, more than we had expected. I think it was because Kami gathered those people we needed to succeed and used them in the right places. Alex & Lanna both had made great contributions for its success.

Another groundbreaking event was KC Chicago's 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebration in November, 2019. My sister, Emiko Otsubo was our guest speaker. Lanna served as interpreter for her. They were able to meet in advance during our welcome party for the visitors from Japan. I was fascinated not only with Emiko's speech, but also Lanna's English.

Alex was MC at the reception. How well he did arrange everything! He did a great job as the moderator and every participant enjoyed the speeches & the performances, while talking over delicious dishes.

Wonderful memories spring up one after another. With gratitude for everything they have done for our church, I hope they continue to deepen their faith and become shining lights to the world.