

2023 July Monthly Service

Good Morning Everyone! Thank you very much for attending our monthly service for July, 2023. I hope you are all in excellent health and in bright, warm Summer spirit.

After the morning prayer service on Friday, June 16, I received a phone call from Keiki Oyasensei, the third successor of KC Airaku, Japan, He told me about the sudden death of Mr. Michael Knuppel in Pekin, Illinois. He was just 42 years old. He also told me that his wife Ichie Sensei & their two children, Nanako (16) & Kazuo (13) would fly for Chicago as soon as possible.

I was shocked and sad to hear that news. At the same time I thought Kami was severe toward the Otsubo families. Ichie Sensei is a granddaughter of Rev. Soichiro Otsubo, the founding minister of KC Airaku. He so earnestly pursued our founder, Konko Daijin's faith that Kami led him to find the Great Truth of Heaven & Earth, that is, "All is Divine Love." It is the true Way of Konko which anyone can follow and become a living Ikigami.

In order to manifest in the world this true Way of Konko, Kami eagerly wishes for such a role model. Kami is looking for a family who respects any happening as Kami's doing with gratitude, whatever it might be and no matter how hard it may be. Kami's wish has been earnest for each human to have their life fulfilled with Kami and attain true world peace.

Kami has tested the Otsubo's by sending them problems that easily could not be accepted. The Otsubo's have done their best to respect each one as Kami's sacred doing, and deepen peace & joy in their hearts to be one with Kami. I now believe such faith practice as the Otsubo's, we members connected with KC Airaku have been remarkably blessed even more than we expected.

Mr. Michael Christopher Knuppel suddenly died of a heart attack on Thursday, June 15. How especially heartbroken his family must have been.

He was born in Peoria, IL on December 8, 1980 as the younger son of Douglas Kim and Cheryl Annette Knuppel. He had grown up with the deep affection for his parents. So he was raised to be calm & spontaneous, kind to others and have a cheerful personality.

He was interested in Japanese anime, so naturally his interest in Japan grew. He also enjoyed traveling, going on road trips with family & friends during spring break & summer vacation. Those things combined to lead him to join the Navy to serve the USA & the world. "See the world" is the Navy's catch phrase.

After graduating from Pensacola Naval Air Station Mike was deployed to Sasebo, Japan in March 2002. He was so excited. He served his entire Naval life onboard the USS Fort Mc Henry.

Ichie Sensei became a Konko minister in May 2002. Through Kami's arrangement Mike met her in August that year. Mike dated her and they came to love one another. He disliked religions, because they have separated people. However the more he knew of the Konko faith through Ichie Sensei, the more he was interested in it. He loved visiting Ichie's family at KC Airaku. Mike was fascinated especially with her father, second successor of KC Airaku, Rev. Katsuhiko Otsubo. He would often visit to see him and loved to learn the essence of the Konko faith from him.

Mike & Ichie Sensei got married on October 6, 2004. Nanako Annette Knuppel was born in May 2007 and Kazuo Christopher Knuppel was born in October 2009. Mike built a beautiful & attractive home with Ichie Sensei & their two children.

The most Reverend Heiki Konko, fifth successor of our founder wrote the Divine Reminder in English for Mike and he treasured it. Mike had an earnest wish to support Ichie Sensei's divine work to establish the Wagakokoro era of peace and joy in the world.

Due to his job he had to stay in Peoria for a while after Ichie Sensei & their children moved to Japan to train themselves at KC Airaku. He had a plan to move to Japan soon, so he lived with his mother, Cheryl-san. Then the pandemic happened. Mike was forced to live away from his family for four years. He was planning to move to Japan this coming August to live together with his family.

But he then passed away suddenly from a heart attack on June 15 last month. Ichie Sensei, Nanako & Kazu got their passports as soon as possible and flew to Chicago on Saturday, June 24.

Heaven and earth were cleansed by short rains early the next morning. And then the sky above was blue and felt comfortable. Four cars, mine & three of our children's, headed to Pekin, Peoria where Mike was waiting for his precious family.

We arrived at the Preston-Hanley Funeral Home & Crematory just after 11:00 am. Mike was lying in the casket. Ichie Sensei saw him for the first time in four years with deep emotion & many overflowing thoughts. Nanako & Kazuo saw him wearing their school uniforms which Mike had never seen.

With an American flag covering his casket the Celebration of Life Service for Michael Christopher Knuppel was held at 2:00 pm in front of the Divine Reminder. Rev. Masanori Takeuchi was the head-officiant and Rev. Ryoichi Iwai from Brazil the assistant officiant. Ichie Sensei confidently played a role as chief mourner, with a calm & indescribably gentle expression, as if the anxiety from the previous day had been wrapped up. The first Konkokyo

service was conducted in Peoria where Ichie's family had lived for 12 years. The Konkokyo ceremonial music was ringing in the hall. Mike's family and relatives were moved to join the service. And with surprise they felt honored to realize the combination of what they knew about Mike and what they didn't after he got married to Ichie Sensei.

Over 80 mourners witnessed the Konkokyo solemn service and the Military Rites which followed. The 'Taps' by a bugle quietly echoed in everyone's hearts and it was a moving farewell ceremony that perfectly harmonized Japanese and Western styles, as if Mike himself was revealed.

It was filled with Kami's awesome workings. Among them Kami had had Rev. Ryoichi Iwai from Brazil join as an officiant for Mike's celebration of life service. Earlier on June 5 at KC Airaku he had been the head-officiant for a combined annual memorial service for Nidai Oyasensei, Rev. Mitsuaki Otsubo and Rev. Mikisaburo Otsubo,. So he was able to accompany Ichie Sensei to Chicago on his way back to Brazil. He was a great helping hand preparing for Mike's service. That was how South America and North America jointly could conduct the celebration of life service for Mike's Mitama spirit. I think such a service in the USA officiated by ministers from both South & North America was possibly the first time ever.

Ichie Sensei was moved with deep emotion to realize that Nidai Oyasensei absolutely accepted all her thoughts today and was able to perform her duty as the chief mourner.

Many mourners told me of their great impressions about the funeral in the Konko style. I could not help but feel that the seed of Konkokyo was planted firmly and felt signs of it sprouting in Peoria.

I really feel the buds of Wagakokoro that Mike & Ichie Sensei have tenderly nurtured will start to sprout from here. I sincerely hope that Kami's far-reaching and great wish about Mike's death will be fulfilled in Chicago and beyond from now on.

From here on I would like to do whatever it takes to help the true way of Konko manifest throughout the entire American Continent.