

Monthly Service at Konko Church of Chicago June 20, 2021

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

Do you remember what happened in Paris, France on Friday, Nov. 13, 2015? A coordinated series of shootings & suicide bombings killed 130 innocent people & severely wounded 352 more. Eight Islamic State militants attacked separate places in one of the busiest sections of the city. The militants were shouting 'God is great!' while shooting. How could they do such brutal, inhumane things in the name of 'God'?

They were all young people. It is natural to expect youthful days to be spent constructively pursuing the truth of life in their world. Once given the precious view of the world, young people tend to do their best to accomplish the potential with their allotted lifetime.

As a religious leader I have felt a great responsibility for the desperate waste of these young people from countries all over the world who would join IS & willfully behave in such a brutal manner in the name of "God."

Since then, I have been sincerely praying that I might be of great service for many young people in the world. I would introduce them to the essence of the Konko Faith which, therefore, would surely lead to true world peace & living fulfilled lives with Kami. If the real message to live a *Konko life of faith* would reach those young people, I believe they would have never joined IS.

I hope KC Chicago becomes a Wagakokoro center for many young people in the world to gather together and learn of real human fulfillment with Kami, & to serve for true world peace. It was then I received the following poem from Kami to describe this feeling of mine:

To you, young people!
Your true Way to happiness
Is found in this Faith.
Come & learn it faithfully;
Become a light to the world!

The use of the words "young people" here refers to all who pursue the true way to real happiness with great passion, regardless of age.

Each person's encounter with Tenchi Kane No Kami is truly miraculous and amazing. I have since been blessed to get to know many more English-speaking people who pursue the true way of Konko. I have mentioned Mr. Massimo Claus in Italy in previous sermons. He is now 57 years old and has great enthusiasm for learning the Konko Faith. He is putting forth his best efforts to walk the true way of Konko and to spread the Konko Faith in Italy and beyond.

Among my recent acquaintances, today I would like to talk about Mr. Jack Ashcraft and introduce him to all of you. He is 53 years old and lives in the State of Kentucky of the USA.

He first e-mailed me on March 19, saying, "I just discovered Konkokyo and find it fascinating and beautiful. Could you perhaps help me find resources where I can learn more?" We started to talk with each other through e-mail and later *Line*, as well. I sent him some materials of our faith.

Then, he sent the following message to me on March 25: "Thank you very much for the books, which arrived today. I have much reading ahead of me! I look forward to learning all I can. As an aside, I host a radio program and was curious if you would be interested in coming on the show to discuss Konkokyo? The show is one hour long, airs every Thursday evening from 7 to 8 pm eastern time. Please let me know your thoughts."

It was not only a great honor for me to do so, but also it would be a great chance to manifest the Konko Faith to the world, which is my earnest wish. Even so, honestly speaking, I first hesitated to appear on the show to discuss Konkokyo on radio due to my poor English-speaking abilities. I first thought it would be very difficult for me to immediately answer any questions in English. However, even so, I instantly decided to take a posture which could be worded in this saying: 'Technique without finesse, that is, without regard to risk.'

So, believing in Kami, I determined to accept this great offer with gratitude. Then during the morning-prayer service the next day, I asked Kami what I should do. And Kami answered, "*The absolute ultimate way is to place Divine Will at the center; in other words, it's entrusting your way of life to Kami.*" I thought Kami would wish me to do my best to discuss Konkokyo on the radio program by leaving everything up to Kami. In that way everything would turn out great.

I e-mailed him that I was willing to take this radio interview. He kindly encouraged me, answering: "Thank you for your email. It would start as one time. If you feel comfortable with the format and speaking, then we can try to arrange more dates for you to appear. In this appearance we would just discuss some basics. That is, the founder and then the basic teachings. Think of it as a discussion just with me, though our audience will be listening in. I promise your English will be fine, and I always do my best to make my guests comfortable." He also said that he would like to have the radio interview about the Konko Faith once a month. He interviewed Rev. Koichi Konko, head-minister of Konko Mission of Honolulu about Mediation on Thursday, May 30 & about Family on Thursday, June 17.

My radio interview was scheduled for April 29. It would be a phone conversation with him. To my relief my radio interview could be prepared beforehand. It would not be like a debate on TV.

Later he sent me his 12 questions about the Konko Faith which most listeners would be interested in. I wrote my answers to these 12 questions and Dick Sensei, head minister of Konko Fellowship of Tacoma kindly edited it wonderfully. I sent that version to Jack.

Here was his response: “Your answers look fine. The interview will be very relaxed, so don't be nervous. I'll open the show by introducing you, then we will go straight into the questions. After 30 minutes we have a commercial break. That is usually 3 minutes. Then when we come back I usually give a brief explanation as to how listeners can support the show, and then get back into the questions.”

In this way my radio interview was perfectly prepared. You can find these 12 questions and answers in the main menu of “Sermons”, titled, ‘April 29, 2021’ on the website of KC Chicago (www.chicago.wagakoronet.org).

The remaining problem was my English pronunciation and rhythm. So, I practiced and practiced with the help of Dick Sensei. Before this radio interview I exchanged e-mails several times with Jack (interviewer). Then to my great honor and pleasure he wrote: “I am the one who is honored to have you as my sensei. Men such as you are rare to find in this world, because you are more than most men. Takamatsu Toshitsugu, the 33rd Soke (originator) of the martial art I teach wrote that Budo (marshal art) is ‘the way of attaining that which we need while making the world a better place.’ He always encouraged students to seek the ‘Jihi no Kokoro (Mercy)’. Finding you seems to me to be the guidance of Kami in pursuit of that goal, which you have called Wagakokoro.”

Jack has always felt a strange connection to Japan. He started to learn Kobudo at age 15 through his spiritual research. He trained in Kobudo for nearly 40 years under the guide of Master Takamatsu’s senior student and teaches it now in his hometown.

My interview was heard in every state of the USA and reached 26 countries. Not only that, it was broadcast through YouTube over the internet and reached more people, as well.

I did my best and enjoyed myself very much during this radio interview. I learned some important lessons. Kami even works through what I thought I should have said more clearly & slowly, and how I should have done such & such. I thanked Jack Ashcraft for providing such a great experience.

He then sent this surprising message to me: “I wanted you to know of my seriousness with regard to Konkokyo. I will be resigning from my priesthood at church next week. I wish to pursue Konkokyo with all my strength.” At that time, I didn’t yet know which religion he belonged to. Then on May 4th he e-mailed this message: “Sensei, I have resigned my position as an Anglican priest as of today. I ask for your kind prayers and merciful guidance in spiritual matters. Without your teaching, I'm clearly lost at this point. Respectfully, Jack”

How sincere he is! What a pure heart he has! I wrote to him as follows: “How brave you are to resign your position as an Anglican priest! You are a genuine seeker of true human fulfillment with Kami. I am amazed with your sincerity. At the same time I feel great responsibilities in helping you to pursue the true way of Konko. I will do my best to pray for you and be the merciful guidance for your spiritual Journey. So please feel free to ask me anything.”

I asked him what brought him to this decision of his. He replied: “What made me choose to leave the Anglican church? I told you of the dream I had many years ago, and the profound effect it had on me. The Kami in my dream exuded such compassion, such love that I was overwhelmed. I can't do it any justice with words. The closest I can get is to ask you to imagine what it would be like if you could feel love in every atom of your body. My entire body was filled with her love, and when I woke, I was in tears. I searched for her identity and could only find her in Shinto. Sadly, being an American teenager in the 1980s, there was nowhere I could go to understand her more; why she'd appeared to me in a dream, and what was expected of me. When I discovered Konkokyo, I sensed that this must be connected to my dream. Somehow Kami had prepared me and directed my steps to this moment. Her love was so intense that it has remained in my memory to this day, and so, in obedience to her compassionate guidance, I decided to leave the priesthood and pursue Konkokyo.” He had this impressive dream of his at age 16.

Deeply moved by his statement, I replied to him: “Thank you very much for sharing your most important & fascinating dream that would lead the course of your life to me. I was moved while reading it. I now clearly understand you have been so deeply connected with that Kami that she has led you to be what you are now, that is, to be an important follower of Konko Daijin.”

Faith is the pursuit of truth beyond the truth. It is going for tomorrow's absolute; it's not staying at today's absolute.

Through Kami's wonderful arrangement I got to know some genuine seekers of true life, like Jack. I now feel a great responsibility for them to pursue the true way of Konko. Therefore, I will do my best to deepen the peace & joy in my heart day by day through every happening and become a good example of walking the true way of Konko.