

Happy New Year! Thank you for joining us to welcome in the 2024 New Year. Also, thank you very much for all the prayers & the support you've given KC_CHI throughout the past year. There are many people from near & far unable to attend, and are praying with us in spirit. May each & every one of you enjoy a happy, healthy & prosperous New Year!

Twenty-six years have passed since my family moved to Chicago to be of service to Kami & people here in the heartland of America. We will celebrate the 15th Anniversary of the establishment of KC Chicago this year.

Looking back on all those years I now keenly realize Kami's wishes to establish a Konko church here in Chicago, and the importance of its existence. There are three main points I wish to share.

The first one is just from a personal aspect. A letter I received in 1997 was from my father, the late Michinori Takeuchi. It was when my family had moved to Chicago to serve Kami & people. He wrote as follows: "Chicago can be pronounced, Shi-Ka-Go and written in Japanese as 師加護 (*shi-ka-go*). With the meaning "Master's Protection," its saying, Chicago is to be the place filled with the protection of your master of life, Rev. Soichiro Otsubo.

Secondly, Chicago is located in the Midwest of the USA. And Chicago is a big city located in the center of North America. Therefore, those who get to know and are interested in the Konko Faith have tried to contact me and asked me for materials about the Konko Faith. They each had an earnest desire to know as much as possible about our faith.

America is a Christian country & many other religions are here, too. There are people, especially young adults, who are interested in the Konko Faith. I wanted to respect their desire for knowledge, and thought I should do my best to answer their questions as sincerely as possible. I wished to convey what I have learned & experienced about this Kami. I sent them as many materials of the Konko Faith as possible and now send my sermons out to more than 50 young Americans.

I always keep in my mind and recite these lines in every prayer service:

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

And finally, the third point is Chicago can be said to be the center of the world peace movement. One of the largest and most influential movements is the Parliament of the World Religions.

In 1893 The World's Columbian Exposition was held in Chicago to celebrate the 400th anniversary of Christopher Columbus's arrival in the New World in 1492. At that time the historic first convening of the Parliament of the World Religions was held and created a global platform for engaging religions from the east and west.

The Parliament of the World Religions, headquartered in Chicago is affiliated with the United Nations Department of Public Information. It cultivates harmony among the world's spiritual traditions; and fosters, guides and engages with institutions in order to achieve a more peaceful, just and sustainable world. Last August I was asked to perform the prayer of blessing at the opening ceremony of the 9th Parliament of the World Religions that was held in Chicago for the first time in 30 years.

It has been 26 years since arriving in Chicago. I feel it such a great honor and heavy responsibility to serve Kami & people in Chicago. I will do my utmost to find out the ideal characteristics of religions' harmony to unite the human race in faith for the future and to make this world the ideal place for humanity to have their fulfilled lives with Kami.

Lastly, I would like to introduce two poems written to celebrate the New Year. Writing a New Year's poem is one of the best ways to look back on the past year and make s resolution for the upcoming year.

The first poem was written by me and is as follows:

**“Welcoming the New Year,
I vow to manifest the Way**

**Whereby Kami & Humanity
Are together prospering in the world.”**

**The second poem was written by Seth Carter, an earnest Konko
believer living in Maryland:**

**“A new year, new life
Purified of misfortunes
There is only light
Shining from within my heart
Ready for the world to see.”**