



2018 Jodo Shinshu Buddhist Temples of Canada

Office of the Bishop Report

Depending on where you live, you may still be encountering winter like weather, where ever you read this I hope you are all doing well. The JSBTC Annual General Meeting will be taking place on April 27th and 28th in Calgary, Alberta.

Report from the Office of the Bishop

When I was still the chairperson of the Ministerial Association, the National Board of Directors used to meet twice a year, once in the springtime and another time during the fall. However, presently the National Board holds a teleconference meeting on the third Tuesday evening of every month. Along with the Ministerial Association Chairperson, the board spends about 1 to 2 hours discussing various items associated with the running of the National Body.

As the Socho (Bishop) of Canada, I have spent time visiting the temples across our country. Over the past year, I have visited the following temples:

November 24th to 26th, 2017: Visited the Kelowna and Vernon Buddhist Temples

December 14th to 17th, 2017: Visited the Manitoba Buddhist Temple

March 2nd – 4th, 2018: Visited the Buddhist Temple of Southern Alberta

June 14th – 17th, 2018: Plans to visit the Toronto Buddhist Temple

During my term in office, the only temple I have yet to visit is the Kamloops Buddhist Temple. I am presently coordinating with the local minister to arrange a time that I can visit the Kamloops Temple.

I have been receiving regular correspondence from our mother temple, the Nishi Hongwanji in Kyoto, Japan. The most important correspondence has been the completion of Monshu Sennyo's Accession Ceremony, which originally began on October 1st, 2016. The final Accession Ceremony Service took place on May 31st, 2017. Representing our Kyodan, Rev. Grant Ikuta led a group of 18 members to participate in the Overseas District Special Accession Ceremony Service which took place at the Hongwanji on Oct. 21st, 2016. I, myself, participated during a special Accession Ceremony Service in March of last year when all the Overseas Bishops attended the service together. For the occasion, I took a \$5,000 donation on behalf of our National Organization. Gomonshu Kojun Ohtani is making an effort to visit all of the districts both within Japan and overseas. In 2015 he visited Calgary and took place in the World Buddhist Women's Convention which was hosted in Calgary. In September 2017, he visited the Hawaii Kyodan, and in March 2018, he made a visit to the district of Taiwan.

I have been receiving other correspondence, both on a regular basis and for special occasions. One such example is writing an official request for the annual New Year's Message from the Gomonshu. A formal request must be submitted six months in advance. Other correspondence includes the necessary paperwork for guest ministers sent from Japan, as well as registering the ministers in Canada according to their rank within the Hongwanji organization. This past year, I received a request from the Hongwanji

monthly publication “*Shuhō*” to have articles submitted introducing overseas temples. I asked Rev. Ikuta to write an article introducing the Steveston Buddhist Temple and Rev. Izumi to introduce the Buddhist Temple of Southern Alberta. The office of the Bishop was responsible for collecting the articles and submitting them to the Hongwanji.

In May 2017, the World Coordinating Council Meeting, also known as the Sochos Meeting, was held at the Hongwanji. Bishops from the Overseas District (BCA, Hawaii, South America, Canada) and representatives from the Hongwanji (Governor responsible for Overseas District and International Department Head) gathered to discuss issues regarding Overseas propagation and the roles of the ministers overseas. The main points of discussion for last year’s meeting were as follows:

- To review the procedure of Sarana Affirmation Ceremonies that the Bishops of the Overseas districts conduct.
- The vestments of Kaikyoshi, to re-emphasize the usage of the Kaikyoshi Wagesa by Kaikyoshi ministers
- The English translation of Gomonshu-sama’s book and the selling of the book overseas.
- The termination of support for propagational activity in Kenya. Due to the lack of evidence of any propagational activity being done.
- Proposal to open a branch of the Hongwanji International Department in San Francisco.

Although it is not the direct responsibility of the Socho, another activity that I was involved with was leading the Young Buddhist International Cultural Study Exchange trip from July 10th to 23rd of last year. From Canada there were 5 individuals (both male and female) who participated. We spent most of the time in Kyoto and Tokyo. Although it was extremely hot and humid, I was relieved that not one individual was affected by the heat and we all came home safely.

As the Socho, I am also responsible for presenting the Honorary Posthumous Title (*Ingo*) as well as commendation awards. Upon receiving the request from the local ministers, the office of the Bishop prepares and sends out these certificates. Another function of the Bishop is to periodically update the Provincial Governments with the Clergy Registration certifying the ministers across Canada to be able to conduct Buddhist weddings at their local temples.

The above is a summary of the administrative activity that is carried out by the Office of the Bishop. Looking to the future, the most pressing issues are the nurturing of new *Kaikyoshi* ministers and the ongoing support of the ministers working throughout Canada.

Regarding Kaikyoshi Ministers

Through observations at the local temples, it is very clear that all of the ministers across Canada are working tirelessly for the sake of the temple, for the members, and for the community at large. I’m sure you would all agree with me on this point. May I ask you for your continued support for our ministers.

In Eastern Canada, due to personal reasons, Rev. Christina Yanko submitted her resignation effective as of January 1st, 2018. With this resignation, the Toronto Buddhist Church has submitted a request to have a native English speaking minister be assigned to their temple.

In December 2015, the Manitoba Buddhist Temple was devastated with the sudden passing of Rev. Michael Hayashi due to cancer. Since then, the temple has been continuing on by having ministers from across Canada take turns going to Winnipeg to conduct services at least once a month. The Manitoba temple has submitted a formal request to find a part time resident minister.

Rev. Yoshimichi Ouchi has completed his one year orientation in Eastern Canada and has received official designation as a Kaikyoshi minister by the Hongwanji and has officially been appointed as the resident minister for Eastern Canada as of September 1st, 2017. Rev. Ouchi comes from the Oita Prefecture in Kyushu, Japan. He has received his certification as a specialist in the area of ritual and chanting, known as “Tokubetsu Homuin”. In Canada, he is the only minister with this certification. While he was still a university student at Ryukoku University, Rev. Ouchi spent a year studying English in the States. He has a good understanding of English and is very skilled in communicating his messages. I am very happy that he chose to come to Canada.

From Calgary, Robert Gubenco has expressed his desire to become a Kaikyoshi minister. Mr. Gubenco is a member of the Calgary Buddhist Temple, and has been supporting the temple as an assistant. In 2014, he received his Tokudo Ordination and has been helping as a Tokudo Minister Assistant since. His next step is to undergo the Kyoshi Ordination which he plans on receiving in November in Japan. For the past two years, Gubenco Sensei has been studying for his Kyoshi Ordination and will be coming to Vancouver in April to further his studies in the rituals and doctrinal teachings of Jodo Shinshu Buddhism.

Comparing Kaikyoshi Ministers from the Past and the Present

In the past, when a Kaikyoshi minister resigned from a temple, the Socho would contact Hongwanji to request a Japanese minister be sent over to replace the outgoing minister. However, today most of the services and temple meetings are done in English. Long gone are the days when it was considered okay for Japanese ministers to come to Canada and learn English while pursuing their career as an Overseas minister. Local temple members expect ministers to be able to communicate in English and to adapt to the changing culture. In such conditions, we must produce Kaikyoshi ministers who are born and raised in this country. Another development that we are witnessing is the increase in the number of those who are receiving Tokudo Ordination and becoming Minister Assistants. One cannot just become a Minister Assistant because they want to be. Presently a candidate must receive approval and support from the resident minister as well as the local temple board. Once the individual has completed the required studies to receive their Tokudo Ordination from the Hongwanji, they may serve as a Tokudo Minister

Assistant under the guidance of the mentoring resident minister.

Unfortunately, the Minister Assistant Program as it currently stands has a number very high hurdles to overcome and must be reviewed further to enable more interested individuals to become Minister Assistants.

Regarding the World Buddhist Women's Association Representatives Meetings

From August 31st – September 2nd, 2017 the biannual World Buddhist Women's Association Representatives Meeting was held in San Francisco. From Canada, Lori North (Fraser Valley Buddhist Temple), Susan Huntley (Calgary Buddhist Temple) and myself (Overseas Bishops act in the role of advisor) attended on behalf of the JSBTC. Since there were a number of items that still need to be resolved, a special meeting will be held this April at the Hongwanji. Susan Huntley and myself will attend representing Canada. The next World Buddhist Women's Convention is scheduled to be held in San Francisco from August 31st to September 1st, 2019. At the present time, we still have only received confirmation of the dates and are still waiting on the registration packages.

A Final Thought..

Recently, regardless of which temple I visit (not limited to just the Canadian temples), it seems everyone is worried about the rapidly declining membership. Even when those who come out regularly to the temple who have yet to sign up as a member are approached to join, we often hear comments such as, "What benefit is there in becoming a member?" The temple is not like a fitness club where membership gives the rights to members for the usage of the facility and equipment. In the case of the temple, even if one is not a member, one can read the newsletter online, attend Sunday services, or volunteer at various events such as cleanup, chow mein making or *manju* (Japanese pastry) making. Because of this people may question, "What's the point of paying a membership?"

It's not as though these individuals are against supporting the temple, most who ask such questions donate regularly, it's just that we live in an age when people look for concrete benefits for paying things like a membership. The thinking towards donations versus membership is quite different. Donations are determined by the individual who is giving the donation, whereas membership is a set fee determined by the organization. Because of this, people have certain expectations of receiving some sort of special benefit from paying a membership fee.

The other day, I happened to be at the Sick Children's Hospital to give an introductory talk on Buddhism to the new medical staff. While I was waiting at the reception area to get instructions on which room the talk was to be held, a gentleman approached me. Seeing me in my robes, the man began asking me questions on Buddhism. During our conversation, I happened to ask him if his child was in the hospital, to which he replied, "No, no, my child is very healthy, and I am grateful that he has never needed to come here." What he said next was most interesting. He said, "Its exactly for that reason that I am donating to the hospital, to express my gratitude for the health of my child".

During our services at the temple, we often recite the **Homage and Three Treasures**. The first line of the Homage begins with “Hard is it to be born into human life, now we are living it. Difficult is it to hear the Teachings of the Buddha; now we hear them.” To be born into this world as a human being goes beyond our simple conceptualization. On top of that to have had the opportunity to encounter the Buddha Dharma is truly a most significant occurrence. We shouldn’t be asking what benefit I receive from becoming a member, instead we should want to become members out of gratitude for encountering the Buddha Dharma, and we should be encouraging others to share in the joy of receiving the teachings. This is known as benefitting the self, while benefitting others, or “Jiri Rita” in Japanese. Perhaps we can find the true meaning of becoming a member when we think of it as repaying our gratitude to the Buddha.

Gassho,

Tatsuya Aoki, Bishop

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