

Sangha in Motion

U.S. Dharma Centers - Staying Connected



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Rissho Kosei-kai commemorated the 110th anniversary of Founder Nikkyo Niwano's birth by holding the World Sangha Assembly 2016 on May 29 at its headquarters in Tokyo. It was Rissho Kosei-kai's first World Sangha Assembly in a decade; the theme was "*Be Happy Together, Be as One.*" About 1,300 members attended from 25 Dharma centers and branches in 16 countries overseas, as well as 30 domestic Dharma centers in the Tokyo Area.

Members from the U.S. attended from Hawaii, Seattle, San Francisco, Los Angeles, San Antonio, Oklahoma, Chicago, New York, Fort Myers, and Tampa Bay. The World Sangha Assembly comprised of a full day program, from the morning ceremony to an afternoon session including performances from members from various international branches.

At the close of the assembly President-designate Kosho Niwano offered greetings, saying, "I am so thankful that all of us, from different countries and with different languages, can gather in the same place with the same faith and bring our hearts together in unity to face the Buddha with our palms together in reverence."

Rissho Kosei-kai International of North America



The Fourth World Sangha Assembly was a wonderful opportunity to gather members from around the world to visit the Rissho Kosei-kai Headquarters, many for the first time. I was deeply moved by each person's impression of the Great Sacred Hall and headquarters. Members expressed how they never would have believed it was so big! By touring the headquarters, not only were they able to raise their awareness of the organization, they were able to meet many Japanese members who showed through their actions how the Dharma is lived in their everyday life.



Before the main event RKINA organized a 4-day trip to Kyoto and Nara with English members from around the U.S., as well as with the members from Europe. The members were thoroughly impressed with the antiquity of the Buddhist temples and shrines we visited. It's hard for Americans to conceive of buildings over 1,000 years old given our short history.



However, even more impressive were the words we received from their respective leaders. Many of them shared their encounters with Founder Niwano and praised his charismatic yet humble character as well as his profound efforts in interreligious dialogue.





Most of the RKINA members stayed at least eight days in Japan and were able to see the ancient and the new aspects of the home country of Rissho Kosei-kai. A visit to Japan for the first time tends to be transformative for many members, who find a world completely unlike what they are used to. More than the many unbelievable sights they were able to see, I hope that what they were able to take back with them was the spirit of the Japanese people and culture, as well as a renewed sense of faith in the Dharma.



Contributed by Rev. Nicholas Ozuna, RKINA

RK Buddhist Church of Hawaii



The Hawaii members were so happy to visit Japan during the World Sangha Assembly. It was hectic to plan and get approval for the itinerary, but the visit for the 110th anniversary of founder Niwano's birth and subsequent tour went off wonderfully. All the Hawaii members came away with a renewed feeling of oneness with our sangha in Japan and throughout the world. It is always an enjoyable staying in the Second Pilgrimage Hall and getting reacquainted with members we haven't seen in a while.



After leaving the headquarters we quickly embarked on a tour of Tokyo, Yokohama, Kyoto and Osaka. Some of the highlights on the tour were: the Nissin Cup Noodle Factory Tour where we created our own instant noodles to take home. Hiking to view Japan's natural splendor at the Bamboo Grove, Golden Pavilion and Kiyomizu-dera Temple. I, for one, gorged myself silly on the food served in the wonderful small restaurants in Osaka. And no trip to Japan would be complete without the shopping for gifts and snacks at Tsukiji, Ameyoko and Kuromon Ichiba Market. I hope these pictures capture the joy and amazement we felt in Japan.



Contributed by Bradley Tom, RK Hawaii

RK Buddhist Church of New York



For everyone it was an incredible experience, surpassing all expectations. It was the first time for many of the sangha members to visit Japan and RK headquarters. So at the most basic level it was a cultural experience for all of them. They were amazed and pleasantly surprised at how warm and hospitable the Japanese people are. This was true throughout our entire stay in Japan, but it was very evident at RK headquarters. The staff went out of their way to make every one of us with our unique needs feel taken care of. Even though I had told them beforehand that they would never feel alone or without help, I still think they were very impressed by the total caring that was given to us. Every detail of our stay at headquarters was prepared for. We are very grateful.

Our members were also very impressed with Great Sacred Hall and the ceremony on May 29. I recalled how I felt when I first saw the Buddha in Great Sacred Hall for the first time at the 2006 Dansan. Like me, my members were awed by its size and beauty. It is one of the reasons why I think it is so important for



members to visit headquarters if they can. There is no substitute for being there, and it confirms one's faith in Rissho Kosei-kai. For those of us that do not live in Japan it is hard to capture the feeling of being a member in Japan. But once you go there you really understand and you begin to appreciate what you are part of. There is no question that all of my members feel a deeper, stronger connection since going to headquarters. Moreover, the beauty and pageantry of the World Celebration was so impressive for all of us. Seeing so many members from all over the world makes us all realize that we truly are associated with a very important and large organization. Our sangha is still small, and it is hard to imagine all of the other sanghas worldwide. Seeing them come together like they did is a very important way for all of us to connect with one another. We don't feel so isolated and we see the enormity of RK in the world. It energizes all of us and makes us want to do even more.



Contributed by Mary Sigman, RK Ft. Myers / New York

Dharma Center of Oklahoma



My name is Chris Peters. I'm a member of RKOK in Oklahoma, United States. Before I share my experience with you about attending the World Sangha Assembly in Japan, I'd like to give you one brief glimpse into my home Dharma Center in Oklahoma.

There is a sign on the inside of our front door at the center, it reads: "*Take your practice with you when you leave.*" I like quotes and this exit door quote is meaningful to me. The exit door quote is focused on practice, not belief or philosophy; the exit door quote is centered on action. My favorite quote from our founder Nikkyo Niwano is: "*Enlightenment is in the encounter.*" It is true. I see the truth of our founder's quote regularly in my daily life. After I share some of my experiences with you of the World Sangha Assembly, you will understand what these two quotes have to do with my participation at the Assembly.

Activities at the assembly included: chanting in The Great Sacred Hall with large number of Sangha members from all over the world, volunteering with local and European members in the kitchen for a dinner, listening to Dharma Journeys by other Sangha members, a hoza session,





talks by Kosho Niwano and President Nichiko Niwano, wonderful skits & music by local sanghas from around the world, and the dancing that followed. These activities were all made possible by sangha members taking their practice out into their daily lives; and committing their time and energy to action for the benefit of others.

The activities of the World Sangha Assembly provided the opportunity for numerous encounters. These encounters were with the person in hoza that felt a connection to something I shared, new friends I made, friendships extended with local members or other members who live hundreds or thousands of miles away, the fun of working in the kitchen with friends for an evening, seeing an example of kindness in action from Kosho Niwano towards another sangha member.

The World Sangha Assembly experiences offered encounters and those encounters provided the opportunity for enlightenment in that present moment. All of this happened because sangha members take their practice with them into their daily lives and into their communities. Our members' vow includes the pledge to follow the bodhisattva way to bring peace to our families, communities, and countries, and to the world. It was a deeply rewarding to experience our members vow full circle by participating in the World Sangha Assembly and then to return home to my family and community to start the cycle again. I do look forward to the next World Sangha Assembly!



Contributed by Chris Peters, RK Oklahoma

Rissho Kosei-kai of San Francisco



In San Francisco, all the members were arriving and going back home on different days. Our only official communication was, “See you on May 29 at 8:30am at the Great Sacred Hall.” That’s how we approached this year’s Dansan.

Early in the morning at 5:30am on May 29, the day of the Dansan, everyone, except those who were staying at a hotel gathered at the Second Pilgrimage Hall dining hall to volunteer for breakfast service. We were grateful for the opportunity and everyone had smiles on their faces and was ready to serve. After serving and cleaning up, all sweaty and tired, we rushed to make it to the Great Sacred Hall by 8:30am. Even though it wasn’t easy to do all this, it was a precious memory for us. This is probably the most endearing part of the San Francisco sangha: although we are separated by distance and circumstance, we can always come together as one for a common goal; “*Many in body, one in spirit.*”



Words from Founder Niwano

The fact that Rissho Kosei-kai has developed as much as it has is because each of you had splendidly fulfilled your respective roles. Furthermore, it is also because your senior leaders had magnificently taught the Dharma with great peace of mind, just like you.

This feeling of “I must somehow help others find happiness. I would like to liberate them” is the great compassionate heart; this is the “abode of the Tathagata.” To reiterate, “No matter what, I must help this person reach the same attainment of the enlightenment that I have” is an example of the “abode of the Tathagata”.


In such ways, you try to wholeheartedly share the teaching with true and deep compassion for that person. Now, if after In such ways, you try to wholeheartedly share the teaching with true and deep compassion for that person. Now, if after practicing to the best of his or her ability, that person should say: “Thank you very much. Thanks to you everything was resolved. I feel truly happy now,” then we can say that you do possess a true and great compassionate heart. Such is the practice of Rissho Kosei-kai.



(Selections of Founder Niwano’s Dharma Talks: Volume 3, Pages 256.18 – 259.8)

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