

Nichiren Shu News

Published by the Head Office of Nichiren Shu Buddhism & NOPPA

No. 229

December 1, 2018

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Women and Religion Conference Held in Italy

Text and photographs by Jan Louy

On October 5-7, 2018, a three-day event was held in Italy, hosting women from different faith traditions to unite and discuss various themes, philosophies, history, theology, issues, and, above all, their hopes and objectives for the future. The well-attended event was conceived and organized by Rev. Shoryo Tarabini from Nichiren Shu Renkoji Temple in Cereseto, Italy. Rev. Tarabini stated that the objective of this conference was, "to examine through open dialogue the various aspects of women, their roles and contributions in respect to their faith, doctrines, and practices." Many people contributed to the success of



Group shot of panelists and attendees from Sunday's discussions in Casale Monferrato.

towards women, income inequality, various doctrines regarding men and women, religious obligations within religions and families, and many other important issues.

One idea that came up in all of the discussions was the fact that each of the represented religions stressed the equality of men and women on a theological basis. It was further noted that a lot of work still needs to be done to raise women up to the level each doctrine teaches. Many of the panelists and attendees expressed enthusiasm to use this conference as a platform for future dialogue and collaboration.



Keynote Speakers: Mila Biscardi, Rev. Ervinna Myoufu, Adriana Ottolenghi, and Nabila Chaibi.

day Adventists; Adriana Ottolenghi, representing the Jewish community; Nabila Chaibi, representing the Islamic community; and Rev. Ervinna Myoufu, representing Nichiren Shu and Buddhism. Speaking to a standing-room-only audience, the four speakers captivated the crowd with a dynamic, intense, and inspirational exchange.

The following two mornings began with visits to various religious centers in Casale Monferrato, a town in the Piedmont region near Cereseto. The tour included visiting an 11th Century Roman Catholic Cathedral, an Islamic

Mosque, and a 16th Century Synagogue as well as religious and civic museums. Saturday's activities concluded with a special formal dinner prepared in the kosher style, which allowed all the participants to share and enjoy the same meal together. Discussion continued in a friendly and intimate manner.

Sunday's round-table discussion was held in Casale Manferrato in an ancient Augustinian convent from the 14th century. The Master of Ceremonies was Fabio Lavagno, President of the City Council of Casale Monferrato. Daria Carmi, the Cultural and Events Director of Casale Monferrato, delivered the opening remarks. Panelists included Monsignor Francesco Mancinelli, Bishop's Delegate for Ecumenism and Interreligious Dialogue for the Catholic church; Dora Bognandi, Associate Director of the Public Affairs Department for the Seventh-day Adventists; Mila Biscardi, an Elder representing the Seventh-day Adventists; Claudia de Benedetti, President of the Jewish Agency in Italy; Nabila Chaibi, Islamic Cultural Mediator; Raffaele Yaqoub Frasson, representing the Islamic Community of Casale Monferrato; Rev. Myoufu; and Rev. Tarabini. Reflecting on the key comments made by the panelists, many topics were emphasized including physical and emotional violence



Rev. Shoryo Tarabini organized the conference.

this conference including many temple members and other religious groups. Special appreciation was extended to Kathie Quinn of the Nichiren Shu Temple in Los Angeles for her generous contribution of the logo tote bags given to each attendee.

The opening ceremony took place at Renkoji Temple with Cereseto Mayor Enzo Lavagno and other city officials warmly welcoming and recognizing the participating religions to this historic first-time event. After some refreshments, the participants convened at Cereseto's City Hall to initiate the first round of discussions. The keynote speakers were: Mila Biscardi, representing the Seventh-



Attendees visiting a 16th Century Synagogue.



Sunday's round-table discussion was held in a 14th Century Augustinian convent in Casale Monferrato.



Opening discussions were held at the Cereseto City Hall.



New Friends: Rev. Myoufu, Jan Louy, Sofia Mohamud, Nabila Chaibi and daughter (in front), and Elisabetta Sivocci.

Origin of ‘Reverend Kanno Preaches’ The ‘Postcard Sermon’ Series

By Rev. Keiryu Shima

The Nichiren Shu News series, “Reverend Kanno Preaches,” originated from his series of “postcard sermons.” The first postcard sermon was published on March 1, 1971. Rev. Nissho Kanno, who is now the Archbishop of Nichiren Shu and Chief Abbot of the Ikegami Honmonji Temple in Tokyo, started the series when he was in charge of publications while working on the staff of the temple’s missionary department. Since that time, Rev. Kanno has been regularly sharing his brief and insightful sermons in postcard form for almost half a century.

The catch phrase of the first postcard issue reads: “Let us consider together, let us move on together towards the Light.” In the early postcard sermons, topics for the sermon were chosen from stories in the newspaper.

The topic taken up in the first postcard sermon was, “Dead Husband Found Alive.” According to a news report, cremated remains were misidentified by family members and then buried, though the person was actually still alive. This became evident when the supposedly dead person’s wife received

a New Year card from her husband, who was working far away from home. Rev. Kanno wrote, “Every one of us believes he is right. However, a proverb says, ‘Search seven times before doubting

others.’ We should do our best to train our own eyes so that we can see correctly, as the Buddha sees through all things. To achieve this, we should try to keep a calm and stable mind in our daily life.”



Rev. Nissho Kanno developed the “postcard sermon” series as a way to reach out to members in a way that was simple and memorable. The series started in 1971 and has also served as the base for the “Reverend Kanno Preaches” column that has appeared regularly in *Nichiren Shu News*.

From the 13th postcard in the series, Rev. Kanno entitled his sermon, “Toh Myoh,” meaning the light to be offered to the Buddha and deities.

Rev. Kanno said, “For the theme of the sermons, I eventually replaced newspaper articles with the Eightfold Noble Path; then the writings of Nichiren Shonin; and then the *Dhammapada*, a collection of verses comprising the basic teachings of Buddhist morality.

“Recently, I have started choosing the theme from our Founder’s writings once again, this time doing it chronologically. Now, the themes are selected from the writing of our Founder when he was in his forties.

“I feel uncertain if I will be able to continue publishing these postcards, taking up the theme from the writings of our Founder, until his latter days in Minobu and Ikegami.”

Rev. Kanno also revealed that he is currently working on compiling his postcard sermons to be published under the title “Toh Myoh” in *Ikegami*, a monthly publication that is put out by Ikegami Honmonji Temple. He is determined to continue writing his postcard sermons as the last studious work of his life.

Buddhism Q&A (12)

By Rev. Ryuei McCormick

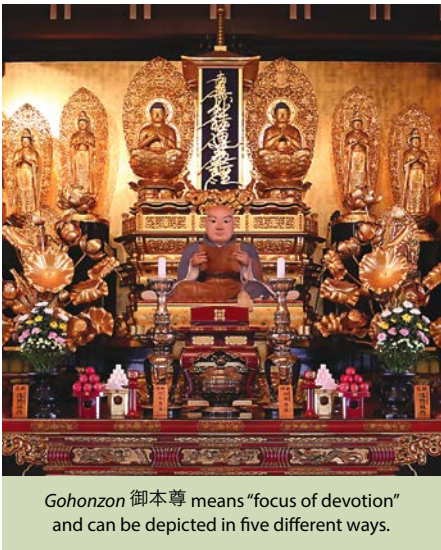
What Is the Gohonzon?

Many visitors come to Nichiren Shu temples, see the statues of Shakyamuni Buddha and Many Treasures Buddha, and then ask, “But where is the gohonzon?” They ask this thinking that the word gohonzon only refers to Nichiren’s calligraphic mandala. I would like to clear up this confusion.

Honzon 本尊 means “focus of devotion.” It is a term used by all schools of Japanese Buddhism in reference to the central image enshrined in a temple or home Buddhist altar. In Nichiren Buddhism, the focus of devotion is often called the gohonzon, because the honorific prefix go 御 is added to it.

In *Kanjin Honzon-sho*, Nichiren Shonin described his honzon in terms of the transmission of the Odaimoku from the Eternal Shakyamuni Buddha to his original disciples during the assembly in space in the Lotus Sutra. After this description, Nichiren Shonin wrote, “Many wooden statues and portraits were made of Shakyamuni Buddha as he preached Hinayana or provisional Mahayana sutras, but statues and portraits were never made of the Eternal Shakyamuni Buddha revealed in Chapter 16 of the Lotus Sutra, ‘The Duration of the Life of the Tathagata.’ Now, in the beginning of the Latter Age of Degeneration, is it not time that such statues and portraits are made for the first time?”

Nichiren Shu depicts the honzon in five different ways based on that passage and other writings from our Founder. In this article, I will explain



Gohonzon 御本尊 means “focus of devotion” and can be depicted in five different ways.

the first two of these, which emphasize the Odaimoku.

The first is the “Great Mandala of Invoking the Ten Worlds” (*jikkai kanjo no daimandara*) composed of Chinese and Sanskrit characters with the Odaimoku in the center. The other writing on the mandala includes the names of the Eternal Shakyamuni Buddha and others who appear in the Lotus Sutra or who were regarded as integral to the practice of the Lotus Sutra by Nichiren Shonin.

The second is called the “One Sacred Title” (*ippen shudai*). It is an inscription of the Odaimoku alone. In *Honzon Mondo-sho*, Nichiren Shonin stated, “We should regard the Odaimoku of the Lotus Sutra as the honzon.”

In the next issue, I will describe the other three depictions which focus on the Eternal Shakyamuni Buddha.

We welcome readers’ questions about Buddhism and Nichiren Shonin. Please send us your questions by e-mail to editor-nichirensnunews@nichiren.or.jp or contact us through your local temple.

REVEREND KANNO PREACHES (54)

“You can escape from the evil realms as long as you chant *Namu Myoho Renge Kyo*.”

—Nichiren Shonin,
Hokke Daimoku-sho



“Faith”

Preceding the above phrase, an excerpt from the original text, Nichiren Shonin states, “The basic way to buddhahood thus lies in faith.”

He tells us, “When you start practicing the teachings of the Buddha, you should know that the primary condition is to do your utmost to keep faith in Shakyamuni Buddha, the Lotus Sutra, and *Namu Myoho Renge Kyo*. It will be an empty prayer, even if you chant *Namu Myoho Renge Kyo*, if you chant the Odaimoku without firm faith.”

Nichiren Shonin also states in the treatise, “Therefore, people can escape the evil realms without understanding the sutra perfectly as long as they chant *Namu Myoho Renge Kyo*.” It means that even if we don’t read through the sutras, totaling some 80,000 volumes, or don’t learn the scholarly treatises, in our daily life we will still be able to abstain from wrong deeds, not be deluded into having the mind of a hell-dweller or hungry ghost, and will reach the state of the Buddha’s great peace of mind.

Living in these days of confusion, the sole way to attain the unshakable great peace of mind is to fully rely on the Buddha and chant the Odaimoku. Nichiren Shonin wanted to tell us this.

Honorable Rev. Nissho Kanno, Archbishop of Nichiren Shu,
Chief Abbot of Ikegami Honmonji Temple, Tokyo

GREAT FIGURES WHO HAD FAITH IN NICHIREN SHU (3)

By Rev. Sensho Komukai

Lady Oman (1577–1653), who had served in the Tokugawa Shogunate from the age of 17, has been known as the most-beloved mistress of Shogun Ieyasu Tokugawa in his latter days because of her graceful figure and sincere personality. At 22, when she lost her adoptive parents, she began to deeply embrace Buddhism. At the age of 30, she studied under Nichion, the Chief Abbot of Kuonji Temple at Mt. Minobu, and she began to have faith in the Lotus Sutra and Nichiren Shonin.

Nichikyo was famous as an energetic priest with broad knowledge and eloquence. The monks from the other schools were no match for him in debate, so they made an unfounded charge against Nichikyo. One day, he was ordered to have a discussion with monks of the Pure Land school in the Edo Castle. Nichikyo was ready and fully confident of winning the debate. However, he was attacked by a rowdy mob of 60 to 70 people on the night before the debate. As he was seriously wounded, his disciples proposed that the debate be postponed, but that was rejected. More dead than alive, Nichikyo was carried on a board to the castle. Far from debating, he was not even able to open his mouth to speak for the discussion. The shogunate abruptly declared that the Pure Land school had won the debate. Nichikyo was immediately stripped of his vestments and robe. Nichikyo along with his five disciples were dragged through the



Statue of Lady Oman, the first woman to climb Mt. Shichimen, with the Shiraito Waterfall in the background.

streets of Edo, and then their ears and noses were chopped off.

Nichion was so enraged to hear of the unreasonably cruel acts against Nichikyo and his disciples that he instantly entered a protest with Ieyasu, demanding that he should have another try at holding a debate with the monks of the Pure Land school. This brought on the further wrath of Ieyasu. Nichion was arrested for his outrageous conduct and sentenced to death by crucifixion. Lady Oman was at a loss for words upon hearing that Nichion would be executed. She was in deep grief, because

she respected Nichion as her Buddhist master. She made a quick decision. Wearing a white shroud, she appealed to Ieyasu with her powerful voice, “If my master Nichion is sentenced to death, I will go with him to the Pure Land of Mt. Sacred Eagle.” Overwhelmed by her desperation, Ieyasu changed his mind, ordering the execution to be stopped. Nichion was pardoned! After that, Nichion lived a secluded life in a place called Ono in the town of Minobu. Lady Oman made a contribution to construct a temple there. This was the beginning of Honnonji Temple.

For a long time, Lady Oman had an idea: she planned to climb Mt. Shichimen, which women had traditionally been prohibited from climbing. No woman had ever climbed the sacred mountain before. When her plan was refused, she insisted, “The Lotus Sutra teaches us that the Buddha’s compassion is equally given to all living beings, and that anybody, regardless of being male or female, can become a buddha. Isn’t it the only sutra expounding the attainment of buddhahood for women? I am sure that women will be allowed to climb up the mountain of the Celestial Maiden Shichimen who vowed to protect those who keep the Lotus Sutra.” Lady Oman purified herself with water under the Shiraito Waterfall at the foot of the mountain for seven days before making the climb. Wearing a white robe called a *gyo-e*, she finally reached the summit of Mt. Shichimen at the age of 64. She climbed Mt. Shichimen a total of three times in her life.

She passed away on August 21, 1653 at the age of 77. In accordance with her will, Her remains were buried next to the tomb of Nichion at Honnonji Temple.



Honnonji Temple is part of Lady Oman’s legacy.

MY EXPERIENCE AT SEATTLE CHOEIZAN ENKYOJI TEMPLE

By Rev. Isshin Sasabe, Ryusenji Temple, Shimane Prefecture, Japan

In June, I had a wonderful opportunity to stay at Mrs. Kazuko Langebehn’s (Seattle Choeizan Enkyoji Temple member) home for a month. There are many Nichiren Shu temples in Hawaii, North America, Europe, and Southeast Asia led by priests who have completed their training at the Shingyo Dojo in Minobusan. Rev. Cederman, the temple’s head priest, is an American Nichiren Shu priest who has not only completed his training as a priest but is also a master of tea ceremony and Aikido.

At the temple, special services are carried out on special days affiliated

with Shakyamuni Buddha and Nichiren Shonin. Every Sunday, Shodaigyo meditation and a lecture on the Lotus Sutra are held. Also tea ceremony, Aikido classes, and many kinds of volunteer activities are open to the public for the further understanding of Nichiren Shu and the Lotus Sutra.

I was able to experience many things on my first trip to the U.S., thanks to Rev. Kanjin Cederman and the members of Seattle Enkyoji Temple.

Each day, a morning prayer service was held at 7:00 a.m. The *kanjo* (invocation) and *ekou* (dedication of merit) were done in English followed by sutra readings in Japanese. An evening service was held each day from 7:00 p.m.

Every Sunday, a service was held in which members came to the temple to read the sutra and chant the Odaimoku. After the services were finished, we sat around together and chatted over tea and snacks.

On the first Sunday of the month, a special service was held to pray for safety and good luck throughout the new month. Temple member Bernie Lau is an Aikido master, and an Aikido practice was held in the main hall. This practice followed the regular service and was open to the public.

On the second Sunday, Rev. Cederman, who is a tea master, held a tea ceremony class in the tea room (*chashitsu*) of the temple after the regular service.

On the fourth Sunday, a study class on the Lotus Sutra was held, in which Chapters 1–28 were explained in detail. A Shodaigyo session was held each Wednesday from 6:00 p.m.

My stay lasted only a month, but I was able to observe and practice propagation at a temple overseas. I experienced daily life using English, including reading the Lotus Sutra in English. I am grateful to Rev. Cederman and all the members of the temple for allowing me to spend time there and to share such worthy experiences with them. I cherish this experience and hope to return someday and participate in the activities at Enkyoji. Thank you very much!

—Translated by Sandra Seki



Traditional tea ceremony and meditation practice with temple member Bernie Lau.



The temple’s main hall became a space for Aikido practice following a regular service. Temple member Bernie Lau, an Aikido master, led the practice, which was open to the public.



Dinner with Rev. Cederman’s family and temple members at Kazuko Langebehn’s home.

TEMPLE EVENTS

Las Vegas Kannonji Temple June Ren Takahashi, Member Pilgrimage to Minobusan

I went on a pilgrimage to the main temples associated with Nichiren Shonin from October 8-13. There were 20 members from Myorenji Temple in Nagasaki and 10 from Kannonji Temple in Las Vegas.

One of the most memorable parts was at the Rinban Service in Minobu, visiting the gravesite of Nichiren Shonin to clean and purify it. It is an honor for all Nichiren Shu followers to take part in a Rinban Service at least once in their life.

Before the service, Rev. Nisso Uchino, Chief Abbot of Kuonji Temple, explained



that there are 287 steps leading to Kuonji Temple, and 287 can be read as “ni-ba-na” in Japanese, sounding like “Nirvana.”

When we started chanting Chapter 16 of the Lotus Sutra in front of Nichiren Shonin’s grave, I felt tremendous comfort and peace. My body seemed to be lifting toward the sky. We chanted the sutra slowly, word by word. A pleasant breeze blew around us, and I thought this might

be the feeling of the Bodhisattvas coming out from the ground. I wished the chanting could have continued forever. It was like a beautiful song for Nichiren Shonin. The rhythm of the *mokusho* (wooden drum) blended into the natural environment of Minobusan. Thank you for this wonderful opportunity to join the Rinban Service.

Honolulu Myohoji Temple Rev. Josho Yamamura New Booklet Published

Our temple has published another small booklet: *Enlightening Messages: Eternal Buddha; In Us, In the World, Part II* by Bishop Nichiou Itagaki of Butsugenji Temple, translated by Dean Makinodan.

From the preface of the original work, we know that these enlightening messages were written during chanting or

in the dead of night in a journal that the author kept. They are statements of the life of true-hearted devotion of this eminent priest. Those who read these booklets are sure to experience an expansion in the breadth and depth of their understanding of their faith. The abundance of knowledge and insights, which are conveyed, make these booklets a collection of enlightening messages that will strengthen the presence of the Eternal Buddha within us and in the world.



MY HOMESTAY IN HAWAII

By Arisa Fujiwara

I am Arisa Fujiwara, a homestay student, from Kyoto. I have been staying here at the Hawaii Nichiren Mission for three weeks, and I really appreciate this great experience. I am very happy to meet all of you. I am having a great time and experience that I’ve never had before. For example, I never expected the people in Hawaii to speak such interesting words like; *kaikai* (food), *moimoi* (sleep), and *pau* (finished). People here speak a mixture of English, Hawaiian, and Japanese. At first, I was surprised and confused, since I couldn’t understand what they were saying.

When I came here, I had three objectives to learn from this program. The main objective was to do volunteer work. Second was to join the activities at this temple. The last objective was to learn about Hawaiian culture in terms of its history, its people, and their beliefs.

During my stay, I visited two nursing homes. I spoke with some of the elderly residents and played the piano for them.



This made a real impression on me, because I learned that we could understand and communicate with each other through our hearts.

As to the activities at the temple, I experienced many new things. I met many people through the preparations for the rummage sale, mailing out newsletters, taking part in the Fujinkai craft classes, and so on. People always welcomed me with open hearts and tried to understand me without any bias.

As to my objective to learn about Hawaiian culture including its history, its people, and their beliefs, I didn’t know much about Hawaii before I came here. Hawaii is famous as a tourist spot, but I didn’t know much about its people, culture, history, or lifestyle. So, I was very glad to learn about them through my visit to the Japanese Cultural Center of Hawaii, Pearl Harbor, and the Bon Dance at the Okinawa Festival.

I feel I have achieved my objectives. However, the most meaningful experience for me was to learn and feel the beliefs and

spirituality of the people in Hawaii and Hawaii itself. During this stay, I spoke with various people and obtained insights about the people of Hawaii. I visited Manoa Falls, Diamond Head, and the beautiful ocean surrounding the Hawaiian Islands. I think Hawaii is a spiritual place that evokes our natural feelings and brings people together in a natural way. I am always impressed with the amazing experiences and lessons I have learned. Before I came here, I had heard that people in Hawaii and Japan had similar feelings or ways of thinking. Now I understand the meaning of this. People have deep respect for all living things, nature, and the gods. These are part of the culture and so similar to the respect and love of nature of the Japanese people.

Moreover, there are various religions here, and people always cooperate with each other. During my stay, I went to various churches, because I have always been interested in various cultures and in the different ways of thinking in different religious and personal beliefs. I am a daughter of a Nichiren Shu minister and believer of Nichiren Shu, but I went to a Catholic high school, and now I am attending Sophia University which is a Jesuit university. I respect and believe their teachings as well.

I had opportunities to meet people from various religions and beliefs. They always taught me important lessons about life. I think that the three most important lessons for me were:

First, I learned to communicate and understand others with deep respect. Even if we cannot accept their ways of thinking, we can try to understand them through communication.

Second, I learned that both knowledge and experience or practice, are important

to understand the true meaning of things. Hawaii was always teaching me those precious lessons during my stay.

Third, identity was the last lesson that Hawaii taught me. It is one of the most essential lessons. Each individual needs to recognize who they are, where they come from, and what they belong to. There are various religions and social beliefs in Hawaii. However, I feel that all of them share the core value of truth. So, I think we should understand the real meaning of truth and take care of all living beings and our Mother Earth as long as we live on this planet.

Through this homestay program, I have been so impressed with the unique culture of Hawaii and by the stories of the individual member’s lives. People have strong consciousness about their identity.

People in Hawaii and the Hawaiian Islands have taught me such precious lessons that have broadened my perspective through their stories and teachings of Hawaiian culture. They have had a great impact on me and my way of thinking.

Finally, I really enjoyed my stay and everyone I met. Three weeks was too short for me, although I learned many things and had many great experiences. After going back to Japan, I’ll prepare for graduate school and study various religions in terms of their beliefs and practices. I think the lessons that I have learned here will give me a lot of inspiration.

I would like to say thank you to everyone, to the Nichiren Mission of Hawaii, to Bishop and Mrs. Hirai, to the gods of Hawaii, and to Hawaii itself. Thank you so much. I wish you all happiness. I hope that we can see each other again someday. *Mahalo* (thank you) for giving me this wonderful opportunity!

Calendar for December 2018–January 2019

DEC 8 Jodo-e (Enlightenment Day) commemorating the day when the Buddha attained Enlightenment.

DEC 31 New Year’s Eve Service; Bell Ringing Ceremony held throughout Japan.

JAN 1 Memorial Service for Nichiji Shonin, one of the six main disciples of Nichiren Shonin.

JAN 13 Minobusan Opening Ceremony for the New Year at Kuonji Temple

JAN 21 Memorial Service for Nichiro Shonin, one of the six main disciples of Nichiren Shonin