

SACRAMENTO NICHIREN NEWS

Sacramento Nichiren Buddhist Church

November 2026

5191 24th Street, Sacramento, CA, 95822 | (916) 456-8371 | www.sacramentonichirenchurch.org

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

🔔 ANNOUNCEMENT 🔔

*Starting November 2026, all services will be held at 11:00am.

NOVEMBER 2026

1	—	No Service
8	11:00am*	Sunday Service Church Meeting
15	—	No Service
22	11:00am*	Komatsubara Persecution Service
29	11:00am*	Kaji Kito

DECEMBER 2026

6	11:00am*	Jodo-e Service Church Meeting
13	—	No Service
19	7:00am	Mochi Tsuki
20	11:00am*	Kaji Kito
27	—	End-of-the-Year Clean Up
31	11:00pm	End-of-the-Year Service

JANUARY 2027

1	12:00am	New Year's Day Service
3	11:00am*	Sunday Service
10	11:00am*	Kaji Kito Church Meeting
17	—	No Service
24	11:00am*	Tsuto-e Service
	12:00pm	New Year's Party

CHURCH MEETING HIGHLIGHTS

OCTOBER 11, 2026

- See "Mochi Tsuki" for details
- See "New Year's Party" for details
- Changed all Sunday service times to 11:00am (see "Calendar of Events")

MOCHI TSUKI

DECEMBER 19TH, 2026 (SATURDAY)

Please mark your calendars for the upcoming Mochi Tsuki (pre-order/pick up). Church members, family, and friends are asked to help prepare and package the mochi starting at 7:00am on **December 19th**.

Orders can be placed online or using the attached order form. The deadline to place orders is **December 5th**.

NEW YEAR'S PARTY

JANUARY 24TH, 2027 (SUNDAY)

The New Year's Party will take place after the church service (Tsuto-e), which will be held at **11:00am**.

The cost to attend the luncheon will be **\$30 per person**. Please contact the church if you would like to attend. The deadline is **January 17th**.

FALL FOOD SALE

Thank you very much to everyone who helped with this year's fall food sale! The net profit, including Fujinkai sales, was **\$11,740.78** (total profit = \$14,021; expenses = \$2,280.22).

2027 CHURCH MEMBERSHIP DUES

Please mail in your annual Church membership dues for 2027. The dues are **\$240** per year.

2027 FUJINKAI MEMBERSHIP DUES

Membership dues for the Fujinkai are **\$10** per year. Please mail in your dues to the Church.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We gratefully acknowledge our generous donations.

SPECIAL DONATIONS

Fusako Okamoto/flowers for the church altar; Mihoko Igarashi/flowers for the church altar; John Hughes/\$100 (pest control); Betsi Anne Nagasawa/\$4.10; Dawn Satow/\$100.

OHIGAN

Yurimi Sawamura/\$50; Peter Kato/\$50; Elizabeth Kono/\$100; Takashi Mizuno/\$100; Keiko Lucas/\$150; Keiko Tsuda/\$50; Elizabeth Nettle/\$25; Deandra Murray/\$41; Kiyoko Kuwabara/\$50; Yoshiko Hitomi/\$50; Brian Tsuda/\$40; Lily Hitomi/\$50; Gail and Dave Tanaka/\$50; Gary and Ruby Gotow/\$50; Fusako Okamoto/\$50; Kathy Mine/\$40; John Hughes/\$150; Mary Hughes/\$150.

FALL FOOD SALE DONATIONS

Ruby Gotow/\$50 (pork, sugar, vinegar, and ice); Lily Hitomi/\$430.69 (miscellaneous items); Merry Hitomi/\$65 (soy sauce and kitchen rugs); Yoshiko Hitomi/\$280 (donuts, umeboshi, and kabocha); Kiyoko Kuwabara/\$279.85 (udon, age, and rice); Fusako Okamoto/\$802 (jam, urizuke, fukujinzuke, and nasuzuke); Jane Nakagawa/\$96 (jam); Audrey Yokoi/treats; John Hughes/ \$87.22 (charcoal).



AI Robot Ministers? Reflections on Genuine Prayer

Kenjo Igarashi

Advancements in technology have made our daily lives increasingly convenient, allowing us to accomplish tasks that once required considerable time and effort. However, the rapid development of artificial intelligence (AI) has also raised concerns about its impact on society. People increasingly rely on AI not only for practical tasks but also for emotional support and personal guidance. Tragic incidents involving AI chatbots and suicide have raised questions about excessive dependence on technology and the dangers of inappropriate AI responses. Similarly, AI-generated or altered photographs challenge our ability to distinguish reality from fabrication.

Recently, I saw reports in the Japanese media about Buddhist temples using robots to chant sutras and conduct memorial services. While this demonstrates how far technology has advanced, it made me wonder whether prayers performed by a robot can truly convey the same spiritual benefits and merit as those offered by a Buddhist minister. In Nichiren Shu, we begin chanting the sutra with an invocation, inviting Nichiren Shonin, the Buddhas, protective deities, and our ancestors into our presence. Through our prayers and practice, we accumulate merit, which we may dedicate to the deceased through memorial prayers. But if a robot performs these same actions, what becomes of the sincerity and spiritual intention behind them? This raises a broader question about the importance of the human heart and mind in our practice.

Although AI can imitate aspects of human reasoning and communication, whether it possesses consciousness or subjective experience remains uncertain. This brings to mind the ancient ideal of "a sound mind in a sound body." Can something without a living human body or the experiences of a human mind truly provide the emotional and spiritual support that people seek? I have previously spoken about Nichiren Shonin's *Isshō Jōbutsu Shō* ("On Attaining Buddhahood in This Lifetime"), in which he discusses the nature of the human mind: "When examining the nature of the mind arising in any moment, it cannot be said to truly exist because it lacks physical color and form. However, it cannot be said to be completely nonexistent either, as a continuous stream of thoughts and mental phenomena continually awaken." The mind is intangible, yet it is not nothing, continually changing through our thoughts and experiences. Can AI truly reproduce this aspect of human existence, or merely imitate its outward expressions? More importantly, when it comes to religious practice, is reproducing words and movements enough to give those actions spiritual meaning?

This question becomes especially important when considering kito. For those of us who have undergone aragyo or kito training, prayer involves far more than chanting sutras or performing prescribed movements. We undergo rigorous physical, mental, and spiritual training before being permitted to transcribe the Kito Sutra by hand. Through this process, we develop endurance, discipline, and a deeper understanding of our responsibility to pray for others. When Nichiren Shonin entrusted the *Kito Sutra* to his disciples, he included an accompanying letter instructing: "It should not be transmitted indiscriminately. Rather, it is to be entrusted only to disciples whose faith is steadfast, whose hearts are free from falsehood, and who have wholeheartedly dedicated themselves to the *Lotus Sutra*. Those who do not meet these conditions are not to receive it." As someone who has undergone aragyo, I take these words very seriously. This training is not simply about mastering a ceremony, but preparing ourselves, in body and mind, for the responsibility of helping those who suffer in this age of mappo. Those who have undergone this training understand its severity, the sacrifices involved, and the seriousness of this mission.

Considering this responsibility, I cannot help but question what it would mean for a robot to perform kito. A robot may reproduce the chanting and prescribed movements, but can it undergo spiritual discipline, develop sincere faith, or understand the responsibility of praying for others? Without these elements, would kito become merely a performance rather than genuine prayer?

Yet this concern extends beyond robots. Even when a human being performs a ceremony or leads a service, reproducing its outward appearance does not necessarily mean that the person has undergone the required training or understands the spiritual responsibilities involved. Kito is not simply an outward form. Its significance lies in the spiritual foundation of the practice and the commitment of the person performing it. Whether performed by a robot or a human being, reproducing the outward form of prayer is not the same as possessing the training, sincerity, and spiritual responsibility that give it meaning.

This also brings us to the importance of how and where we participate in religious practice. I have previously spoken about how we can chant the sutra and practice our faith wherever we may be. Technology has allowed those unable to attend services to remain connected to their religious communities, and this is valuable. Nevertheless, there is something especially meaningful about gathering at the temple, where generations of believers have chanted the sutra, offered prayers, and accumulated merit through sincere practice. This is particularly significant for kito. Being physically present to receive prayers from a properly trained minister who has dedicated their body and mind to this practice offers a different experience from observing the ceremony remotely. The importance lies not simply in physical proximity, but also in the training, faith, and spiritual dedication underlying the ceremony.

As technology continues to advance, I do not believe we should reject its usefulness. Rather, we must recognize its possibilities while understanding its limitations. AI may reproduce the words, sounds, and movements of religious practice, but this should encourage us to reflect more deeply on what makes prayer genuine. The same reflection applies to those who undertake religious ceremonies themselves, reminding us that authentic training, sincere faith, and spiritual responsibility cannot be replaced by outward appearances alone.

Ultimately, genuine prayer is not simply something we perform. It is something we undertake with our entire body, mind, and heart. In an age when the outward forms of religious practice can so easily be imitated, the importance of authentic training, sincere faith, and genuine prayer becomes greater than ever.