

## Notes & Queries

### Moloka‘i Kannon

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IN 2004, WHILE RESEARCHING a book I wrote called *Guardian of the Sea: Jizo in Hawai‘i*, I interviewed Rev. Shugen Komagata several times at the Wahiawa Rusenji Soto Mission. During one of our talks he told me his grandfather, Bishop Zenkyo Komagata, then the head of the Soto Mission of Hawai‘i, had established Guzeiji Soto Mission of Moloka‘i in 1928. Rev. Komagata also mentioned that the Guzeiji temple had opened a satellite chapel at the leprosy settlement in Kalaupapa with a special statue called the Moloka‘i Kannon. In 2015, while I was researching a book on Kalaupapa, I visited Rev. Komagata, now Bishop Komagata, at his office in the Soto Mission of Hawai‘i headquarters on Nu‘uanu Avenue. When I asked him to tell me about the Moloka‘i Kannon, he provided the information that follows.

When the first Pan-Pacific Congress of the Young Men’s Buddhist Association was held in Honolulu during the summer of 1930, one of the delegates from Japan was Rev. Chiyu Misawa. A representative of Tsurumi Girls High School in Yokohama, he boarded for three weeks at the Soto Mission of Hawai‘i in Honolulu. During his stay in Hawai‘i Rev. Misawa visited the leprosy settlement at Kalaupapa to pay

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On November 9, 2010, Bishop Shugen Komagata and his wife Faye visited Tsurumi High School in Yokohama, Japan, the home of the Moloka'i Kannon. Courtesy of Bishop Shugen Komagata.

his respects to the memory of Father Damien, who was well known in Japan. While he was there, he met Japanese patients who asked him to send them a statue of Kannon from Japan to help fulfill their religious needs. Kannon is a Buddhist deity, a *bosatsu*, or bodhisattva, who, as a model of love and compassion, is special to those who are suffering.

When Rev. Misawa returned to Japan, he conducted a successful fund raising campaign at Tsurumi Girls High School and used the donations to commission a statue of Kannon from Zuiun Yamamoto, a prominent Buddhist sculptor. When Yamamoto finished the statue, Dr. Daijo Ohinata delivered it to Hawai'i. Earlier on April 25, 1928, the Soto Mission of Hawai'i had opened a temple in Kaunakakai, the Guzeiji Soto Mission of Moloka'i, with a full-time minister. The minister and members of his congregation delivered the statue of Kannon to Kalaupapa and installed it in a building that served as a satellite

chapel. It is now known as Buddhist Hall. During the years that followed the enshrinement of the statue, successive Buddhist ministers and visiting ministers continued to provide services to the patients. In the absence of a permanent minister Kalaupapa staff member Sachihito Kamemoto and his wife took care of the chapel and the statue, while the Guzeiji temple in Kaunakakai continued an annual tradition of presenting New Year's mochi to the Japanese patients.

When the need for Buddhist services at Kalaupapa finally ended, the statue was returned to Guzeiji Soto Mission of Moloka'i, where it remained for 15 years. In October 1996, it was moved to the Soto Mission of Hawai'i in Honolulu. Due to the statue's extraordinary value, which was estimated then to be \$100,000, the headquarters decided to return it to the original donor, which is Tsurumi High School today. It was sent back to the school in March 1997, where it was enshrined in their auditorium. It is still known as the Moloka'i Kannon.

