

FPCA 75 Year History

(Web site editor's note: this article on church history was written in the late 1980s for the church's 75th anniversary.)

By TED TAJIMA (Editor of the *Clarion*.) In 1913, when Pasadena's center of town was Fair Oaks Avenue and Colorado Street, orange orchards and farms stretched beyond Lake Avenue, there were about 100 to 150 Japanese here, mostly young men who were students or domestic workers. There were only about 10 Japanese women here in those days.

At the time, the First Congregational Church maintained a mission, started in 1905 or 1906, which reached out to these young Japanese. The Friends Church also had a mission with a similar purpose, to offer these newcomers a night school, dormitory facilities and introduction to the teachings of Christ.

In 1913 the two missions combined and, joined by other churches, formed the Federated Missions for the expressed purpose of providing a church to serve the Japanese in the community.

The churches in the Federated Missions made spiritual, educational and financial contributions. They were the Central Christian, First Baptist, First Congregational, First Friends, and Lake Avenue Congregational and Pasadena Presbyterian churches. Their participation included providing leaders who worked in the mission and served with the Japanese leaders who came to the community for short periods of time.

The immigrants were single men, not yet settled in homes and jobs, and many of them floated from town to town. The charter members of the new church, the "Pasadena Japanese Union Church," numbered 23 and most of them were only 18 to 30 years old. Some attended Pasadena High School, then located at Los Robles Avenue and Walnut Street, diagonally across street from where the First Congregational Church is today.

In 1973, as part of our church's 60th anniversary, a plaque was placed in our sanctuary foyer, listing the charter members of our church. They were Hajime Arima, Takesuke Chigami, K. Hashimura, Nihachi Hayashida, Heizaburo Iijima, Kenzo Iijima, Ryoji Kato, Makoto Kobukata, Hitoshi Makino, Nisuke Mitsumori, Yasohachi Miyawaki, and Jiro Morita, Naonori Morita, Ryoichi Nishio, Nami Ohtomo, Yusaku Sato, Shigetaru Shiraishi, Kozo Tabuchi, Ichiro Takemura, Kuniyoshi Uchida, Kuzo Uyeda, Rokuro Watanabe and Kensaku Yatsu.

Three of these men attended that celebration 15 years ago. They were Nisuke Mitsumori, Kuniyoshi Uchida and Kensaku Yatsu. Today Mr. Yatsu is the only charter member still living. He is 104 and quite alert living in a retirement home in Seattle.

BEHIND THE STORY OF THE GROWTH OF this church is the story of many people who served patiently and faithfully on the Federated Missions Board. Parallel to their efforts were the vision and work of our pioneer Issei laymen and ministers who built a church that would serve them and their families and their neighbors, would be a legacy to their children and would serve their God.

The first home of the new church in 1913 was a two-story frame house at 139 Mary Street. That street has disappeared in the past 15 years. It was situated where the north wall of the huge Ralph M. Parsons Company now lies, near the corner of Fair Oaks Avenue and Walnut Street.

In this first home the young Japanese men of that day found a dormitory for temporary housing, an employment bureau and a place to learn English. Here, most important of all, they came in contact with the living Christian spirit in the people who opened and operated the mission.

With the growth of the mission, there came a need for more dormitory space and an extension of the work to the women and children in the families the men started. Classes in cooking, sewing and English were organized for the women. The Federated Mission in 1916 leased the Revere Hotel, then located on the southwest corner of Fair Oaks Avenue and Walnut Street. Membership in the church fluctuated throughout these early years but reached a high of 81 in 1917. The newly organized Sunday school had nine children.

The church extended ministerial and lay service to Sierra Madre, South Pasadena and Lamanda Park. Lamanda Park was the area we call East Pasadena today, east of Sierra Madre Boulevard. The combined Japanese population in those areas and Pasadena was above 100.

In 1920, the church had to vacate the Revere Hotel and purchased, with considerable help from Federated Missions, a house at 293 Kensington Place. For 45 years, this site was our church home.

IT WAS A FINANCIALLY TRYING TIME. Total membership in 1921 was only 33 and there was a swinging door of ministers. Five different men served between 1920 and 1928. Yet there must have been keen vision and wonderful faith, for the church undertook a building project, the construction of a two-story edifice with a basement for a social hall and a sanctuary with adjacent Sunday school area that could be opened to the sanctuary when additional seating was needed. In 1924, the building was completed at a cost of \$17,000. The Federated Missions Board pledged \$12,000 and church members accounted for \$5,000.

The house was moved to the back of the lot and the sanctuary building was constructed on the Kensington Place frontage. The house was the manse for whoever was serving as the minister. But it also served a number of other purposes, its parlor being a meeting place for church groups and its rooms also serving as Sunday school classrooms. Later this house was identified by a historical society as an example of the type of house built by Indiana settlers in the Pasadena area.

After World War II this venerable house was a hostel for people coming back to Pasadena from relocation camps and Eastern states, then a Sunday School building and the manse for the Rev. Jingoro Kokubun, who served as a leader for our Nichigo, or Japanese speaking congregation. It was fondly called the "Kokubun House".

The 1920's saw a growth of facilities to serve the growth in membership as more and more Issei settled with their families here. The church became more than ever a family institution with increasing attention given to serving wives and children.

In 1922, the Christmas program was attended by 165 people. A new Ford was purchased in 1923 because the Sunday school needed transportation. It was the custom up to World War II to provide transportation for Sunday school children, and some parents' autos and the church car provided a "bus" service.

THE FIRST VACATION BIBLE SCHOOL WAS OFFERED AT OUR CHURCH IN 1924. The most significant move that year, however, was the founding of the Women's Christian Association, better known as the Fujin-kai, with 25 charter members. This organization and a parallel group, the postwar Women's Association for Nisei members, would be the most productive organization in terms of service and in relating women to the church.

That year the church suffered a fire that caused damages estimated at \$2,036 to the dormitory building (behind the sanctuary).

Through the efforts of the Federated Missions Board, the city schools' Board of Education set up an English course for Japanese women. There were 242 Issei women here at the time, and Mrs. Bessie Waterhouse, an old friend of the church, taught the course. She also taught cooking and sewing. During these years the Fujin-kai also began holding annual bazaars.

In 1928, our church's membership reached 75 and Sunday school enrollment was 124. Of that number, one-half came from non-Christian families, so the church was fulfilling one of its goals, carrying the Christian message to non-Christian families.

From 1909 (while two missions were serving the Japanese) until 1928, a total of 11 ministers served our congregation. No one of them served more than three years. (The ministers who served our church are listed

elsewhere in this document). In 1928, the Rev. Kengo Tajima was called from Salt Lake City to be the pastor, and he served 14 years until the evacuation of our congregation in World War II.

In 1929, the church recognized a new medium of education and purchased a 35-millimeter movie projector.

DESPITE THE DEPRESSION OF THE 1930's, our church expanded its property. The lot next to 293 Kensington Place was purchased and a house moved to it to serve as a manse and as additional Sunday school space. That house was moved to 305 Kensington Place from South Marengo Avenue, just behind the present Security Pacific National Bank building on the corner of Marengo and Colorado Boulevard.

The entire transaction incurred a debt of \$7,000 to the church, but this mortgage was paid off within ten years. Again, much credit went to the Federated Missions Board, to a hard working congregation and a community that gave its support.

Some of us may recall the efforts of young people who staged melodramas two summers in a row to raise funds and help pay off the mortgage. They were produced and directed by Delos West, a good friend with seemingly limitless knowledge and skill in music and drama and, more importantly, unflagging patience working with Nisei who had rarely exhibited thespian talent. The basement social hall of the Kensington church was transformed into the "Kensington Music Hall," and "The Drunkard" and "Tatters of Squatters Gulch" offered strong lessons in morality, heavily layered with corn.

Those benefit productions were in the latter 1930's. Back in the year 1930 the church, urged by Issei parents concerned about their sons, chartered Boy Scout Troop 41, which still thrives today. Ten charter members made up the troop.

The Sunday school numbered 200 children, the peak of its pre-World War II enrollment, in 1931. This number included the Cradle Roll, originated and conscientiously carried on by Emma B. Fuessle. A widow of a missionary, she was one of the first organizers of the Congregational Church mission back in 1905 or 1906. In 1931, the church membership, made up of Issei, was 86.

THE YP, OR YOUNG PEOPLE'S SOCIETY, was started in 1929 and by 1936, was drawing as many as 100 to meetings. By then, there were three groups, all meeting on Sunday evenings. For some time, the pastor published a weekly mimeographed bulletin in Japanese. He laboriously cut stencils by hand. It was called the "*Shuho*" and continues today as the Japanese language page of our weekly newsletter, the "*Clarion*".

In 1935, the first English language newsletter in our church made its appearance under the guidance of Sophie Tajima, daughter of the Rev. Tajima. She later married the Rev. Donald Toriumi, our church's pastor for 31 years after World War II. The mimeographed bulletin was called the "YP Lancer" and appeared biweekly. Among staff members were present-day Pasadena residents Miki (Arnai) Kumamoto, Fumi (Matsumoto) Konagamitsu and Frank Tanaka. The mimeographer is a paragon of loyal service, Makoto Uchida, who printed the first editions of the "Lancer" 53 years ago and still prints the "Clarion" today six months of every year.

In 1936, the church's first choir was organized. Named the Dorcan Choral Society, it practiced and sang under four different directors and, on a couple of memorable occasions, participated in mass choirs numbering more than 125 voices from Japanese churches throughout Southern California.

TWO SIGNIFICANT DEVELOPMENTS BECAME apparent during the 1930's. Nisei were growing up in church responsibility, and more and more of us were taking over Sunday school teaching and supervision. The Japanese congregation as a group was also assuming greater financial responsibility in the church and lessening dependence on the Federated Missions Board. It was during this period in Issei and Nisei church members that this progress was devastated. The outbreak of World War II in 1941 and the forced evacuation of all Japanese and their dependents from the West Coast in early 1942 closed our church. With fortunate foresight, our church and the Federated

Missions Board had made plans for the protection of church property and for re-building American-Japanese relations in the community.

When our congregation went into exile in 1942, the Federated Missions Board assumed responsibility for the property. The church building was used for storing goods for the Japanese in our community. Much work and time was given by board members during the war years.

Under the direction of Katherine Fanning and Sarah Fields, two former missionaries to the Orient, the two houses on the property were used for American Friends hostels. The organization, Friends of the American Way, was formed by Christians in the area to work for restoration of the civil rights of Japanese Americans, and one of the steps was to put up a bulletin board with a service flag and the names of 117 Pasadena area Nisei who were serving in the American forces during WWII.

Leaders of the Friends of American Way are remembered for keeping in touch with evacuated families and servicemen and generally conveying the feeling that there were people in the Pasadena who cared about what was happening to the Japanese residents now dispersed. The organization also collected toys and clothing for children and sent them as Christmas gifts to Gila River Relocation Center, where many of the Pasadenans were sent. Willie C. Carr, a realtor in Pasadena, kept up a steady stream of letters to servicemen. When the war ended and the Japanese returned to this area, he assisted many with housing matters and opened his house to church groups for meetings and social events.

The congregation was not moved en masse to Gila in Arizona, but the majority of the families were sent there. There our church members joined a church that included Christians from other areas relocated to Gila. During the war years many of the families relocated to Midwestern and Eastern states where they found employment and, in many instances, settled permanently. Our church's pre-war congregation was thus reduced.

THE POSTWAR PERIOD WAS A TRYING TIME. Families that had been forcibly removed from homes and placed in the rude, barren, congested clapboard barracks of hastily constructed camps and those that had relocated in the Midwest and East faced new decisions: should they stay where they had relocated, should they return to home communities where they might face animosity and not be welcome, or where should they move to if not their home communities? The Pasadena area had gained a reputation among returning Japanese as a desirable city in which to settle. The Federated Missions Board members, Friends of the American Way and other community people who had expressed concern for the evacuated Japanese had, in their efforts, earned a warm reputation for the area.

In the postwar years this city, which had a Japanese population of about 200 families and 1,000 people before the war, absorbed a population of well over 600 families and 2,000 Japanese by the mid-1950s. Reopening a Christian work among the Japanese here at first met with some disagreement. The Congregational Church denomination wanted the Nisei to join already established churches in the community. The Issei wanted a church and, in 1945, the Rev. and Mrs. Jingoro Kokubun came here to serve them. They also wanted a church for the Nisei and Sansei, and the Nisei felt better about having their own church.

The congregation, which before the war had been a "union church" with connections to the Congregational Church denomination, decided that it wanted the Rev. Donald Toriumi for our its minister. He was then serving Christ Presbyterian Church in Hollywood. To obtain his services, it would be necessary for our congregation to decide to be Presbyterian, to sever ties with the Congregational Church and to apply to the Presbyterian Church for affiliation. All the steps were taken by August 1948 and we became the Pasadena Union Presbyterian Church. The Rev. Toriumi delivered his first sermon here September 5 and was officially installed October 10. All this was dutifully reported in the *Clarion*, the weekly bulletin initiated early that year by Donald Tanzawa and a group of young people who had rallied around the church for the community.

THIS WAS A PERIOD OF ENTHUSIASM among the Japanese in the community. Both Issei and Nisei had been uprooted from their homes by the war and evacuation, had scratched for a place they could call home, had had their loyalty as Americans tested, and had chosen the Pasadena area where they wanted to establish their homes and raise their families. The situation was ideal for the return of our church to ministering to the people and to teaching the good news of our faith. The Japanese and Japanese Americans coming to Pasadena wanted a community identity. They wanted a place where they could worship, they wanted a Sunday school for their children, and they wanted a center where they could gather and share experiences and work together for progress in resettlement. Our church provided such a place.

Once our church established a foundation with a Nisei leader assisted by an Issei minister, we grew in programs, numbers and strength. In 1953, when we celebrated our 40th anniversary, our membership reached 235 and Sunday school enrollment was 195, with an average of 150 children coming on a Sunday. The baby boom was on. Nisei families were increasing in number, more Japanese returning from relocation were choosing Pasadena and the area as the ideal place to settle, and our church's work was escalating. In 1954 we had three choirs – Issei, Nisei and children. Vacation Church School in 1955 drew 163 children for two weeks and had 74 teachers, helpers and drivers. In 1956 we remodeled the sanctuary. Two years later we purchased a manse on Winona Avenue and freed the old green manse at 305 Kensington Place to full use for Sunday School.

That year, realizing that we had to take major steps to meet the problems of an ever-growing program, our congregation kicked off a building fund drive. In 1959 earnest planning for a new church began. In 1961 the congregation approved the purchase of a site on Lincoln Avenue at Harriet Street in Altadena, our present location. It was level and three times the size of our Kensington Place property. There was a bus stop on the corner. The back property line was already fenced by Pasadena's Franklin School. And it was in the general northwest Pasadena area to which many of the families were moving. On October 15 the Building Fund was kicked off with a goal of \$222,900. In one month, half of that goal was pledged. The total goal was pledged before the end of the year. By May 1962 the property was acquired and paid for. The mortgage was burned that June at a church picnic. In October 1963 architects were selected. In March 1967 we had the ground breaking on a rainy day. The buildings were finished by autumn of that year and we began to move in before year's end. Great Day! On March 17, 1968 our new church was dedicated. Great Day again! On March 28, 1976, eight years and a few days after the day of dedication, the new church's mortgage was burned. Over 500 donations had given to the Building Fund – families, couples, individuals, organizations, friends, near and far. Pledges in all amounts were completed. Elaborate annual bazaars had drawn tremendous community support. Our oldest member, Mrs. Kei Hiraiwa, who died after a long Christian life of 96 years, had left her estate to the church. And a countless number of people had given countless hours of time, their best ideas and thoughts, their skills and talent and energy, and their prayers to this church. They had given much; just as our first Issei members and all other members and friends over the years had given much to our church and to the glory of God.

THERE WERE MANY OTHER HIGHLIGHTS in our church's history, too many to enumerate. We would remember, however, that the Rev. Toriumi started a "God and Country" program in 1958 and, in the next 20 years, 95 Boy Scouts and two girl Explorer Scouts completed the required training. In April 1963 the congregation was proud of our pastor when the Rev. Toriumi was presented the honorary degree of Doctor of Divinity by Occidental College. In 1964 Masayoshi Kawashima was called to our church as assistant pastor to the Japanese-speaking congregation. On June 14 he married Hope Omuchi and on September 17 he was ordained. He served until 1972.

In the 1960s and 1970s an annual event was the bazaar, which added to the Building Fund and rallied tremendous community involvement and support. In the 1980s our Nisei, who were reaching retirement age, began to feel reluctant about continuing these demanding fund raising events. In recent years, however, Sansei assumed leadership roles and rejuvenated the Nisei, and the bazaars, now called Fall Festivals, were resumed with energy and success. One of the most dramatic examples of the Rev. Toriumi's leadership was his role in the United Presbyterian Churches' resettlement program for Southeast Asian refugees. As one of the prime movers of the Asian Presbyterian Caucus, he encouraged churches to adopt refugee families, and our church was one of the first to do so, adopting the Vietnamese family of Mr. and Mrs. Tche-Yu Wang, their two sons, two daughters and a son-in-law in 1975. Our congregation provided a home and physical, financial, emotional and moral assistance to the family. The Wangs have become independent and self-sufficient. In the past three years the congregation has helped support three young people in unusual and productive missions to foreign lands. Carolyn Iyoya was selected for the Presbyterian Global Youth Ministries Peacemaking Seminar in 1985 and traveled to the Soviet Union that summer. Richard Sahara was named a Volunteer in Mission and spent the summer of 1986 working in Thailand. Stephen Sato served as a Volunteer in Mission in 1987, also in Thailand.

IN THE PERIOD SINCE WE MOVED to our present site, we have been led by the Rev. Toriumi, who retired in 1979 after 31 years of productive leadership; the Rev. Leonard Osbrink, who served a trying three and a half years; and the Rev. Nicholas Iyoya, who accepted our call and came here in June 1983. Mariko Yanagihara came to us as an assistant to the pastor in 1985 and was named Associate Pastor in 1986. She was ordained that year, the first Japanese American woman to be ordained a minister in the Presbyterian church of America. In 1974 our membership had reached 637.

Today, however, we are reduced in active membership and attendance. We have been victims of demographics. Because of immigration patterns forced on Asians, our Issei came to the United States before 1922 and few Japanese migrated here until the 1950s. As a result, we have unusual highs and lows in the Nikkei population. Most

of the Nisei are in their 60s and older. Most of the Sansei are in their 30s and 40s. The Yonsei, or fourth generation, are still being born. Those already born are in pre-school and elementary school. So, we have gaps in school agers (sic) and college agers (sic) and between the Sansei and the Nisei. Our Issei membership is very small. Our Nisei are getting on in years. Many of our Sansei have moved to other areas or are attending other churches. We are now vigorously developing a young family program and our Sunday school on the Yonsei level.

Our church's 75 years are a fascinating story of devotion on the part of turn-of-the-century Caucasians who founded missions and of young Issei who accepted this outreach, and with conviction developed the missions into a church. It is our story of how we were uprooted from our homes and our church by World War II and forced to maintain family lives, find employment, and uphold our loyalties in strange places and environments. It is a story of our return, to carry on our lives, continue our traditions, raise our families, and endeavor to maintain this mission, this ministry in our community. It is a story of how we, like all our brothers and sisters in Christ, praise the glory of God and strive to serve him through the ministry of His Church. It is a story that must and will continue.

Leaders of the Church

Rev. Shokichi Hata (1909-1912)
Rev. Tatsujiro Sawatani (1913)
Rev. M. Kohara (1914-1915)
Rev. Tsuyoshi Demura (1915-1917)
Rev. Kichisuke Suzuki (1917-1918)
Rev. Magojiro Furuya (1918)
Rev. Mitsutaro Tsuji (1919-1921)
Rev. Hidenobu Toyotome (1921-22)
Rev. Kiyoshi Tamura (1922-1925)
Rev. Junzo Nakamura (1924-1925)
Rev. Toyobei Nakazawa (1926-1928)
Rev. Kengo Tajima (1928-1944)
Rev. Jingoro Kokubun (1945-1960)
Rev. Donald Toriumi (1948-1979)
Rev. Masayoshi Kawashima, Issei Assistant Pastor (1964-1972)
Rev. Kenji Kikuchi, Issei Assistant Pastor (1974-1975)
Rev. Koichi Yamamoto, Issei Assistant (1978-1981)
Rev. Leonard Osbrink, Interim Pastor (1980-1983)
Rev. Motoharu David Seya, Nichigobu Assistant (1981-1983)
Rev. Nicholas Iyoya (1983-89)
Rev. Mariko Yanagihara, Associate Pastor (1986-1992)
Rev. Bob Holmes, Interim Pastor (1989-1991)
Rev. David Isamu Manock (1991-2000)
Rev. Harriet Johnson, Nichigo Pastor (1998–present)
Rev. Judith Rarick, Interim Pastor (2001-2004)
Rev. Dr. Keith Edwards, Senior Pastor (2004 - 2008)
Rev. Dr. Margo Houts, Interim Pastor (2008 – 2009)
Rev. Mark Buchanan, Senior Pastor (2009 – Present)

