

CLARION

Bridging the Centuries through Faith
1913 – 2020



FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, ALTADENA

Altadena, California 91001
Wednesday, November 17, 2021
Volume LXXIII, Number XLVI

OUR CALENDAR

MONDAY, NOVEMBER 15

Clarion Mailing 8:00a

SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 21

In Person Worship Service

Sunday Family Worship 10:30

MONDAY, NOVEMBER 22

Clarion Mailing 8:00a

SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 28

Sunday Family Worship 10:30

LEADERS IN WORSHIP

We are grateful to those persons who led us in worship on Sunday, November 14, 2021, with social distancing. Call to Worship, Sue Morris; Scripture, Rebekah Morris (); music, Kenny Elliott, Ann Kiriya, Ron Ota, Greg Middleton, and Gus Zdanovich; Sound and Visuals, Sam Gin, Bob Hayashi, Ron Ota, and Nick Tomoyasu; and the Rev. Anne Oglesby Edwards for her sermon "".

A reminder for those who cannot join us in person, we are live streaming our 10:30 worship service via YouTube. The link is sent out by email the day before service, or search "First Presbyterian Church Altadena" on YouTube. Service is simultaneously recorded, and can be viewed at a later time.

WHO'S MAILING

November 22	Volunteers
November 29	Volunteers
December 6	Volunteers
December 13	Volunteers

STAFF NOVEMBER 7

Editor	Donna Kiriyama
Printer and Mailing Crew:	
	Gini Ishida, Dorothy Kirkland,
	Evelyn Lew, Bob & Mae Uchida, and
	Wade Utsunomiya
Mailer	Bob Uchida
Email	Bobby Hayashi

On Sunday, November 7, 2021, we were blessed to have the Rev. Wendy Tajima lead us in worship and Communion. Her sermon, so relevant to our church at this time, drew many requests to be published in the Clarion, so that you the readership may also hear her words. With her permission, we present the following.

PIONEERS

Rev. Wendy Tajima

Jeremiah 29:4-7

4Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, to all the exiles whom I have sent into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon: 5 Build houses and live in them; plant gardens and eat what they produce. 6 Take wives and have sons and daughters; take wives for your sons, and give your daughters in marriage, that they may bear sons and daughters; multiply there, and do not decrease. 7 But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare. (NRSV)

Hebrews 12:1-3

1Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, 2 looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who for the sake of the joy that was set before him endured the cross, disregarding its shame, and has taken his seat at the right hand of the throne of God. 3 Consider him who endured such hostility against himself from sinners, so that you may not grow weary or lose heart. (NRSV)

Good morning! It's good to be with you again, and touch base, especially for All Saints Sunday. I really like this day because we can remember those saints who came before us, and whom we can join at the Lord's table for a Communion of the Saints. When there are times of uncertainty—and we're now nearing two years of serious uncertainty—it's good to be able to draw strength from our roots. I've always felt it's a blessing for Asian-Americans that we have a better sense of our ancestry than many Americans, so we can turn to the stories of our ancestors for inspiration and assurance.

I'm glad to look back on our history today, because I was just asked to speak at a conference of the National Caucus of Korean Presbyterian Churches, the NCKPC, as they are celebrating their 50th anniversary. As they try to figure out the future of the Korean church in America, especially as new immigration from Korea is drying up, they turned to their sunbae, the Chinese-American and Japanese-American church, for advice. That's my new Korean word for the month, sunbae. I Google'd it, and learned that I'd know what it is if I was a better K-pop fan, because there's been some controversy. You see, the older K-pop bands have been offended that the newer bands don't show proper respect for their sunbae—those who have been doing it for longer. So the NCKPC thought they could glean some lessons from the experience of the Chinese, or in my case, the JPC, the Japanese Presbyterian Conference. And I had the side benefit of doing some research, and pulling together the story of our churches, and the experience of Japanese-Americans, into one long presentation.

The only problem was that as I prepared to share, I wasn't totally sure if we could show them the path forward, or if the history of the Japanese church was more a cautionary tale of what to avoid, because it seems that we still haven't figured out for ourselves what our future is, even as we move into our 4th and 5th generations in America. You know, when I was in seminary, I preached on the Jeremiah passage, and at that time I said that the Japanese were in America for about 70-something years, which was the time that God told the Israelites that they would be exiled in Babylon. But now we've been in the US for a century or more, and we aren't going back to Japan as the Israelites went back to Jerusalem. So what do we do now? (Continued on page 2)

OUR THANKS

Our church expresses our sincere appreciation to the following members and friends for their gifts from November 10, 2021 thru November 16, 2021

Deacons

Tom and Tsuru Miyasaki

In Memory

Karlene (Misa) Fukuma and the late Sho Fukuma,
In memory of Kimio (Red) Hamane
Kiku Matsumoto, In memory of her parents, Kaichi
& Masayo Matsumoto, & sister Aya Matsumoto

Presbyterian Women

Tom and Tsuru Miyasaki

Special

Bob Uchida, for Fellowship and Youth Work

Thanksgiving Season

Keiko Abe
Larry and Wandy Jung
Judy Kam
Betty Kiriayama
Mark Matsui
Walter Naydo
Reiko Nikaido
Dorothy Potter
David and Ivy Yee Sakamoto
Mark Tajima
Nancy Toyota

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**SUNDAY, DECEMBER 12, 2021
CONGREGATIONAL MEETING**

**TO PRESENT AND APPROVE THE SLATE
OF NEW CHURCH OFFICERS.
STEWARDS, DEACONS, ELDERS**

Pioneers (continued from page 1)

As I said, we are blessed to be able to look at our roots, that great cloud of witnesses who formed this church, through many trials and persecutions, under the guidance of Jesus Christ, helped by several local churches. We hope to see where we are going by considering where we come from, and by studying Scripture to discern what God might have in store for us.

Now when we consider the Japanese-American church, it is quite different from many other immigrant churches. For one thing, most Japanese did not come to America as Christians. Now in some cases that might be good, as too many Westerners confuse being Christian with being Western, so they mistake something that's American with being Christian. But the Japanese are unique in resisting converting fully to any one religion. For instance, in Japan, only about 1% or less are committed Christians. I've been told that many Japanese joined the Christian church to become enculturated to American society. And like all immigrant churches, the church doubled as a community center and cultural sanctuary, as well as a community of faith. The church is the one place where immigrants can speak their language, eat their food, and be respected as leaders without having to explain themselves. The immigrants are so grateful to have this safe new home in a strange land that they are happy to just belong.

For most immigrant churches, the crisis comes when the second generation enters adulthood, because they often reject the church in their attempt to be more "American." World War II caused the Japanese-Americans to stay strongly connected to the church for an extra generation. For obvious reasons, it wasn't until the Sansei grew up that Japanese felt fully American, and didn't need to seek the safety of the Japanese church. So it was the Sansei, mostly Baby Boomers, who started asking classic second-generation questions like:

- ◆ Now that "just belonging" is not enough, what does the church mean to us and future generations?
- ◆ As we are adults, we want to be leaders who can make changes that work for our peers, even if the changes don't necessarily make the older generations comfortable.
- ◆ As our peers (and families) look increasingly diverse, how will the church welcome them while retaining the church's identity?

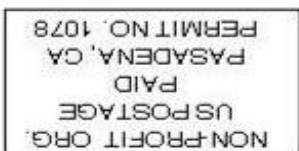
I don't know if we have ever answered these questions adequately, even as the questions are now being asked by Yonsei and Gosei. On the other hand, what have we learned from the saints who came before us, the Japanese pioneers in the United States and in the Japanese-American church?

I think this is important, because I believe that every culture demonstrates different aspects of the gospel, so our cultural perspective on the Christian faith can be a gift to the whole Christian church. I remember a church worker who said that when she worked with some Japanese, even those who weren't Christian, they seemed more "Christian" to her than North American Christians.

(Continued on page 3)

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November 17, 2021

Pioneers (continued from page 2)

How do you think our cultural perspective can further Christ's gospel? Off-hand, I suggest several traditional Japanese values that are in line with the Bible, such as:

- ♦ the sacrifice of our ancestors, offered for our sake
- ♦ the ability to prioritize the needs of the group over the desires of the individual
- ♦ individual humility that can lead to respect for others, compassion towards those in need, and the ability to listen
- ♦ perseverance and diligence in the work
- ♦ a strong aesthetic and appreciation for the arts
- ♦ the perspective of humanity as a small part of God's creation, which I think could lead to a more balanced approach to the environment.
- ♦ an orientation towards justice, rooted in the suffering of our ancestors.

Many of these attributes are sorely needed in the church of North America now. If we are so "American" that we lose these values, it would be a loss to the church. If we still have these values and perspectives, are we willing to model and teach them to the wider church?

Of course, we also have our challenges, some of which are the flip side of our gifts:

- ♦ Out of our humility, do we shy away from leadership and telling our own faith stories, especially to strong-minded newcomers or pastors?
- ♦ Does our reverence for our ancestors paralyze us, for fear of disappointing or disrespecting their legacy?
- ♦ Do our diligence and perfectionistic tendencies prevent us from taking the risk to be obedient to God's challenging will?
- ♦ Has the memory of our own persecution morphed into futile attempts at assimilation, rather than staying at the margins and reaching out to others who are struggling as we had in the past?

As we think of the legacy and lessons from our ancestors, we need to think of who they were—and we also need to consider all of our ancestors, spiritual as well as biological. For instance, we might be tempted to "play it safe" or to just stay home, thinking that our saints would want it that way. However, we wouldn't be here if our ancestors didn't dare to go far from home. That's why the Issei are called pioneers, because they came to this strange land and figured out how to create a path for themselves. Though they may not have known it at the time, they fulfilled the prophecy in Jeremiah, building homes, planting gardens, marrying locals, and working for the shalom of this new land.

We also need to consider who is our real pioneer? The Bible tells us that Jesus is the pioneer and perfecter of our faith—and Jesus didn't tell us to stay safe at home, shut away from the world, holding on to what we have. Jesus challenged us to leave our home, to see all others who do the will of God as family, and to give freely to others trusting that God will provide, even if we face persecution in the short term.

So what do we make of all this? What is the future for this church? When I was preparing my presentation for the Korean church, I noticed a few things:

- ♦ As I already mentioned, the later generations will call for change.
- ♦ Japanese have been marrying non-Japanese more frequently than they marry other Japanese—to the point that it was estimated there are now more multi-ethnic/biracial Japanese than those who are only Japanese.
- ♦ We have fewer Japanese going into pastoral ministry, so it's likely that if the Japanese church stays open, there will be non-Japanese and non-Asian members and pastors. The 16 Japanese Presbyterian churches are now led by 9 White pastors, 2 Korean-American, 2 other Asians, and 4 Japanese—and all are male except for 1 White and 1 Japanese woman. And you can't count on the newcomers to understand Japanese-American Christianity, so they may not recognize how our traditions can communicate the gospel in compelling ways. You will need to teach them.

While I cannot hand you the vision God has for you—it's your responsibility to discern that, not mine or any pastor—I encourage you to go deeply enough into Scripture and prayer—and discussing your faith—so that you are primed to discover God's vision for you, find leaders who are open to it, and not let yourselves be subject to the vision of others.

You can discern what is to be preserved, what needs to be received anew, and how to bring them together as a celebration of God's glorious creativity—a creativity you can teach to others. In fact, it's a creativity many of us have already been practicing, in our family life. If you have people new to the culture who have married into your family, my guess is that someone has taught them the rules of the house, even as you've accommodated their different needs.

Consider, as an example, what happens for shogatsu, New Year's. In my family, we always went to the Tomoyasus for New Year's Day, where the table was always overflowing with great Japanese food. As the tradition passed to another generation, the participants—and the food—became more diverse. But we still have ozoni, and chirashi, and lucky beans, and everyone is expected to eat it, and they are welcome to contribute. And adjustments will continue to be made as needed, like this last New Year's, when the food was still offered, even with COVID restrictions—by being packaged up in takeout bento boxes!

So, let us give thanks that the Japanese-American pioneers took big risks to come here, and retained the most precious values even while adapting to the new world, just as they and Jesus Christ persevered in love even through suffering. And let us be true to what the pioneers taught us, Jesus as well as our biological ancestors. And one last thing: consider that you are the pioneers for future generations. What bold, faithful new paths will you make for them?