

GARDENA VALLEY
BAPTIST CHURCH
1914-2014:

HIS FAITHFULNESS CONTINUES

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FOREWARD

In 2011, when I was asked to be Moderator/Board Chairperson at Gardena Valley Baptist Church (GVBC) for the 2012-2014 term, a major attraction was the opportunity to work on the upcoming 100th Anniversary celebration of the church in 2014. One project that I wanted to pursue was the creation of a book that would document the first 100 years of the church, from its foundation to the present time.

Adam Marshall immediately came to mind as the perfect person to undertake this work. Adam was a long-time member of GVBC and had recently earned a master's degree in history from Pepperdine University. I believed that his familiarity with the church and strong academic background in history would enable him to write a well-documented, comprehensive history of GVBC. Our church board readily approved both the project and Adam as its author.

One of the immense challenges that Adam faced as he began his research was the scarcity of material about the church, especially regarding the early years. Adam spent hours scouring records in the church basement and the offices of the American Baptist Churches of Los Angeles, Arizona, and Hawaii (ABCOFLASH). He also spent considerable time searching old newspaper articles about GVBC in the public library and interviewed many older members of the congregation—some of whom have since passed—for their recollections of major events at the church.

But Adam went beyond the mere recitation of factual information about the church. He also researched the contemporaneous historical and cultural circumstances that occurred in order to place the events in a broader, more understandable context. God's work at GVBC took place in the ebb and flow of what was going on both nationally and globally through much of the 20th Century and the beginning of the 21st Century and the book reflects that.

A fair, balanced, and accurate history of any organization must include both the high points and the low points. In this regard, Adam did not limit himself to writing about the proud moments of GVBC's history. He also included the difficult and challenging periods that faced the church. However painful the memories of some of these events may be, it was necessary to include them, not to embarrass anyone, but to show how God worked through these times to bring the church to where we are today.

With a project of this size and complexity, a number of unexpected delays occurred which prevented the history book from being published in time for the 100th Anniversary of GVBC in 2014. These delays have now taken us more than five years beyond that initial target date to now. But it was more important for us to ensure that the book was fair, balanced, accurate, and interesting rather than to rush publication in order to meet a deadline. For we proceeded on the assumption that this book would represent the most definitive account of the first 100 years of the church and would benefit generations to come.

In addition to Adam, I wish to commend and thank the members of the 100th Anniversary Planning Committee; members of the GVBC Board of Deacons; the pastoral staff, especially the senior pastors; members of the congregation; and others who have contributed in the creation of this history book. The final push to complete the book would not have happened without the hard work of Nelson Shirota as well as Kirstin Colyer-Vizthum and Amy Kushigemachi, who brought their gifts and talents to the design and overall look of the book. We hope that this book will lead the reader to a greater understanding of how God has worked in the life of GVBC over the years. We pray it will demonstrate that God has been faithful to the church and that, as stated in our 100th Anniversary motto, "His faithfulness continues . . ."

David Cheng
GVBC Moderator/Board Chairperson
2012-2014

February 2020

INTRODUCTION

So many wonderful things could be said about Gardena Valley Baptist Church (GVBC), but only a few of these things can be said in a short history book, and to portray the church accurately, a historian must also include the trials and struggles the church faced as well as its victories. As this is the first edition of GVBC's history, I expect some revisions and corrections may be forthcoming.

In June of 2012, the GVBC History Committee asked me to begin writing the history of GVBC. This process involved searching through the church archive of photos and documents, canvassing local newspaper archives, visiting the American Baptist Churches of Los Angeles (formerly the Los Angeles Baptist City Mission Society) office in Glendale to scan relevant documents, and interviewing willing members and former members about their experiences at GVBC.

It has been an honor and a privilege to interview over thirty people and record their memories of the church. These people offered honest recollections, anecdotes, and impressions of what occurred in the past. Some events took place a long time ago, and people might remember the same events somewhat differently.

I would like to thank those interviewed: Pastor Ron Matsuda, Pastor David Shinoda, Dr. Paul Nagano, Harold and Reiko Kobata, Molly and Cyril Nishimoto, Helene Shimane, Larry Sanders, Alice and Perry Miyake, Betty Adachi, Bruce and Francis Kaji, Chiyo Aiso, Edith Kunishige, Elsie Hirota, Frank Nakamura, Hazel Endo, Richard and Howard Imatomi, Matt Miyaguchi, Tak Shimazaki, Ruth Kawai, Ryo and Jean Komae, Suzanne Hasegawa, Pastor Sam and June Tonomura, Fred Tanaka, Marianne Matsuda, Pastor Bunso Otani, and Pastor Steve Langley.

I would also like to thank Debbie Gentry of American Baptist Churches of Los Angeles for her help in locating and scanning GVBC documents, the GVBC History Committee for their time and guidance, and the GVBC office staff: Wendy Nakano, Jan Magnani, and Peggy Kushigemachi. Thanks also to Mitch Homma for his valuable input and photographs, and Sue Marshall, Susie Shelly, David Cheng, and Pastor Steve Langley for their editorial talents, and Silvio Carrara for his photographic expertise.

Faith has overcome adversity in the life of GVBC. The first generation of Japanese immigrants to America (*Issei*) suffered prejudice and hardship, and nearly all West Coast Japanese were evacuated to United States Government internment camps during World War II. GVBC thrives today because the faithful did not quit. They believed that God was raising up a church that would stand the test of time. As a member and student of the church I can attest that His faithfulness has been evident from the first meeting of the church until today.

Adam Marshall

January 2017

Torrance, California

GLOSSARY OF ACRONYMS AND JAPANESE WORDS

ABCLA: The American Baptist Churches of Los Angeles (formerly the Los Angeles Baptist City Missions Society)

LABCMS: The Los Angeles Baptist City Missions Society

ABHMS: The American Baptist Home Missions Society

GVBC: Gardena Valley Baptist Church

Issei: The first generation of Japanese to come to America

Nisei: The first generation of Japanese Americans born in the United States

Sansei: The second generation of Japanese Americans born in the United States

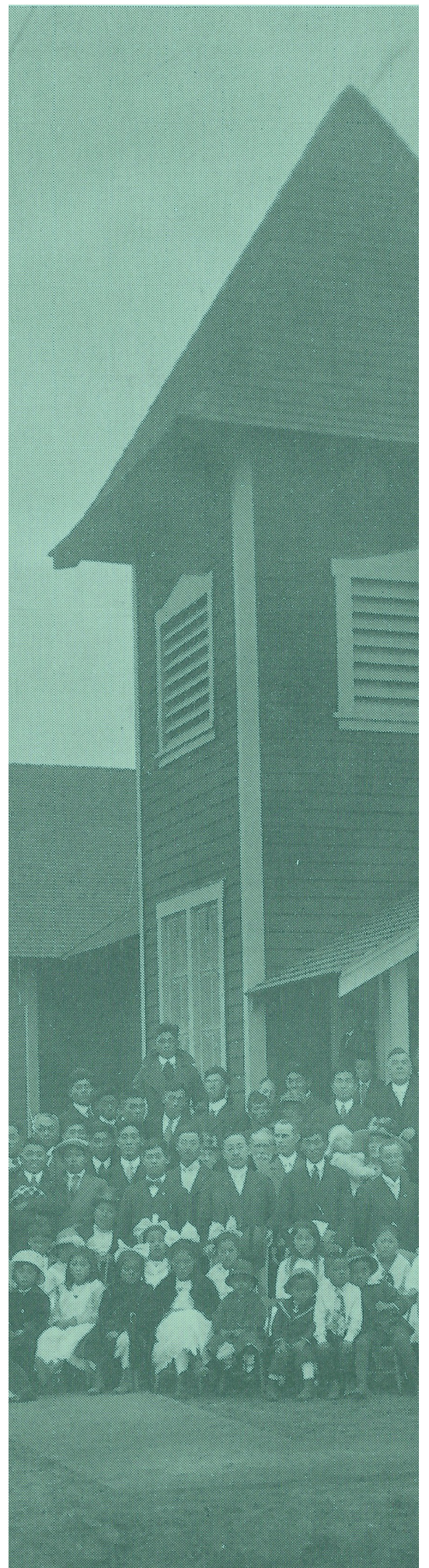
Yonsei: The third generation of Japanese Americans born in the United States

SIGNIFICANT DATES IN THE LIFE OF GARDENA VALLEY BAPTIST CHURCH

- August 16th, 1914 Pastor Haruye Shibata held the first Sunday school class with 20 children in a rented cottage.
- September 28th, 1919 Moneta Japan Baptist Church (GVBC), under Pastor Kiyoshi Shiraishi dedicated the new chapel at 16400 Dalton Ave.
- 1921-1922 Pastor Shibata Returned as Senior Pastor
- 1922 Pastor Kumao Egami replaced Pastor Shibata.
- 1926 Pastor Paul Watanabe replaced Pastor Egami.
- 1929 Masahiko Wada called to pastor GVBC. Fundraising drive held to build a better youth facility.
- 1932 new youth facility dedicated.
- 1939 Gardena Valley Baptist Church celebrated 25th anniversary. *Japanese Baptists in Southern California are Marching On* published by Baptist Union (written by Pastor Shiraishi)
- 1940 Pastor Jitsuo Morikawa called to pastor the Nisei.
- 1942-1945 The Exile Years: Japanese evacuated to relocation camps. Los Angeles Baptist City Missions Society (LABCMS) removed GVBC's buildings from the Dalton Avenue property
- 1945 Pastor Shiraishi returned to GVBC to help reassemble the church
- 1946 Dr. Roy Ishihara led about 25 members gathered in rented facilities, at the Torrance First Baptist Church, and at the Seventh Day Adventist Church on Denker Avenue
- 1948 The Baptist City Missions Society (LABCMS) began to acquire the present campus at 1630 West 158th Street
- 1950 Pastor Harumi Nishimoto replaced Pastor Shiraishi as Pastor to the Issei
- 1951 GVBC Sanctuary later known as Christian Education (C.E.) Hall built
- 1954 GVBC celebrated 40th anniversary
- 1954 Pastor Eishi Hirose called to pastor Nisei
- 1963-65 Fundraising campaign begun to buy present property from LABCMS.
- 1964 GVBC Golden Anniversary
- 1970 Construction began on present church sanctuary
- 1971 Church established a preschool with 55 children
- March 28, 1971 present sanctuary dedicated
- 1980 Pastor Nishimoto retired after 30 years of service to GVBC. Pastor Kunihiko Amano called to pastor Issei.

- 1981 Pastor Ron Matsuda called as Associate Pastor of GVBC following eight years of missionary service in Indonesia.
- 1986 Pastor Hirose retired.
- 1986 Pastor Ron Matsuda chosen as Senior Pastor.
- 1987 Pastor Amano left the Nichigo congregation
- 1987 Pastor David Shinoda called as associate pastor
- 1988 Pastor Amano resigns as Pastor of Nichigo
- 1988 Toshikatsu Kamiyama became pastor of Nichigo.
- Oct 29, 1989 GVBC celebrates 75th Anniversary
- 1990 Pastor Ron Matsuda resigns as Senior Pastor of GVBC.
- 1992 Interim Pastor, Dr. Kopp, preaches at GVBC
- 1993-94 Interim Pastor, Dr. Lightbody, ministers at GVBC
- 1990-1994 Pastoral Search Committee seeks a new Senior Pastor
- 1994 Pastor Steve and Nancy Langley accept pastorate of GVBC after a three-year search
- 1995 Pastor Stan Komae leaves GVBC taking about 40 members with him
- 1995 Pastor David Shinoda leaves GVBC for a pastorate in San Jose, California.
- 1996 Pastor Ron Matsuda returns to GVBC as part-time Teaching Pastor
- 1999 Pastor Bunso Otani becomes pastor of Nichigo.
- 2000 Pastor Kamiyama resigns as leader of Nichigo
- 2000 Nehemiah Funding Campaign and Building Project
- March 10, 2007 GVBC Community Hall and new classrooms dedicated
- 2010 Nichigo Pastor Bunso Otani retires
- 2011 Pastor Eiji Osato called to lead Nichigo
- 2012 Pastor Ron Matsuda retires from GVBC

CHAPTER ONE
Beginnings: 1914—1922





Los Angeles and Redondo Railway Company Station Gardena, c. 1910

BEGINNINGS: 1914-1922

Gardena Valley Baptist Church, formerly Moneta Japanese Baptist Church, began in a rented cottage on August 16, 1914, in an agricultural area of South Los Angeles County. It is the oldest Japanese Baptist church in California.¹ The land upon which the church sits, and its first edifice at 16400 South Dalton Avenue, were part of the Spanish land grant of Rancho San Pedro, briefly administered by the Mexican government following its independence from Spain, and a part of U.S. Territory following the Mexican-American War.² Confederate Civil War veteran Spencer Roan Thorpe founded a settlement near the intersection of 161st and Figueroa streets. Allegedly, Thorpe, or his daughter, named the area “Gardena” for the gardens and greenery of the area.³

The fertile croplands of Gardena drew Japanese immigrants seeking to gain a foothold in a new land and who worked the fields in Gardena, Moneta,

and Strawberry Park--incorporated as the City of Gardena in 1930.⁴ The “Gardena Plains” became a rural Japantown, second only in population to Los Angeles’s Little Tokyo.⁵

Early twentieth-century Gardena scarcely resembles the urban, Los Angeles County bedroom community that it is today. A sampling of headlines from *The Gardena Valley News* in 1928, the first year of microfilm in the Gardena Mayme Dear Library, bears witness to the rural nature of the community and the technological state of the world. “Linton Molery...received a broken arm last Sunday while cranking his car.” “Drastic Measures Are Advocated to Curb Chicken Stealing Epidemic.”

The expansion of rail lines in Southern California put Gardena on the map. The Rosecrans Rapid Transit railway joined Agricultural Park (now Exposition Park) to settlements near the beach cities of the South Bay by 1887 and passed through

Gardena.⁶ The Redondo Railway Company took over the line a year later, connected Redondo Beach to Los Angeles, and caused the locus of Gardena to shift from Figueroa Street westward to Vermont Avenue.⁷ The California Pacific Railway Company built a line from Los Angeles to San Pedro by 1903, which included a stop in Gardena, and another line from Moneta to Strawberry Park by 1907. In 1912, Henry Huntington's Pacific Electric Railway joined Watts to the existing Redondo Beach line. By 1940, buses began to replace trolley cars, and by 1950, the Red Cars were gone.⁸

World War I and GVBC

Although the First World War began June 28, 1914, near the time GVBC began, the cataclysmic events half a world away went unnoticed among Gardena Japanese. No U.S. veteran of The Great War—Japanese American or otherwise—survives, and no living memory of the war exists within GVBC. Harold Kobata, likely the church member with the longest continuous attendance, heard that Harry Masai Sr. fought bravely in The Great War. (A U.S. Department of Military Affairs record bears out

Harold's memory, recording that Masai spent four months in the U.S. Army and was released in 1919).⁹ Pastor Kiyoshi Shiraishi, GVBC's second minister, filled out a draft registration card on June 5, 1917.¹⁰ His registration card noted he was employed as a pastor at the Japanese Mission, and he could not serve in the military because he was classified as an alien.¹¹

Japan Coming To America

In 1853, U.S. Navy Commodore Perry sailed gunships into Tokyo Harbor, forcing the Japanese nation to accept trade with the west. Perry's incursion closely preceded the Meiji Government (1868-1912) which, for the first time in two hundred years, allowed for Japanese to emigrate.¹² The earliest Japanese emigres landed in the Kingdom of Hawaii, and some made their way to California.

Prior to 1873, Japanese converts to Christianity could be prosecuted under the nation's laws. The Meiji's government's openness to the outside world led to the decriminalizing of Christianity.¹³ However, efforts of Western Christians to win converts during the last century have been ineffective, as only one percent of the Japanese population is Christian today.



Moriguchi Strawberry Farm

Emperor Meiji transformed Japan from a feudal agricultural nation to a world power and sought trade and cultural exchange with the West. In addition to greater openness, the new government imposed greater tax burdens on farmers and conscripted young men into military service.¹⁴ The shortage of farmland in Japan coincided with tales of wealth in Hawaii and demand for inexpensive labor in America. The United States Congress's Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 outlawed further Chinese immigration and created a labor shortage in agriculture and industry. These factors combined to draw daring young Japanese men to cross the ocean to America.

One hundred years after the founding of Mission San Diego in May of 1869, the first Japanese immigrants entered San Francisco Harbor—bound for the Wakamatsu Tea and Silk Farm Colony—a stone's throw from the 1848 gold strike at Sutter's Mill.¹⁵ Of the fifty-five Japanese counted in the 1870 census, thirty-three lived in California. Numbers remained low until the 1890 census with just over one thousand Japanese in the United States and half of them living in California.¹⁶ The success of Japanese farmers drew the ire of white supremacist groups and labor unions, both of whom deemed them a threat to white workers and the white race.

Anti-Japanese Sentiment in America

From the beginning of their sojourn in America, the first generation of Japanese immigrants, or Issei, suffered racial prejudice and persecution. The many Chinese workers who came to America to build the railroads and mine for gold had suffered the same fate. Governor Leland Stanford singled them out as pariahs in his 1862 Inaugural Address:.

The settlement among us of an inferior race is to be discouraged, by every legitimate means. Asia, with her numberless millions, sends to our shores the dregs of her population... the presence of numbers among us of a degraded and distinct people must exercise a deleterious influence upon the superior race, and, to a certain extent, repel desirable immigration. It will afford me great pleasure to concur with the Legislature in any constitutional action, having for its

object the repression of the immigration of the Asiatic races.¹⁷

Governor Stanford aimed his remarks primarily at Chinese immigrants, as the speech occurred prior to the bulk of Japanese immigration, but he used the terms Asia and Asian to paint Japanese and Koreans in his broad racial brush strokes.

Japanese immigration spiked between 1890 and 1907. These sojourners entered a California awash in contempt toward Asian immigrants. In *Issei: The Shadow Generation*, Tsukasa Matsueda describes the Issei feeling of second-class citizenship: "We knew how much they hated us, but we just kept working hard and vowed never to lose to the whites."¹⁸ Second-class citizenship and competition among the races in California made for an unpleasant introduction to their new country.

Prejudice toward the Japanese became government policy in the so-called Gentlemen's Agreement of 1907. In response to United States Government pressure, Japan voluntarily limited the flow of male Japanese agricultural workers.¹⁹ Professional men such as doctors could enter, and wives and children could join their husbands in America. Many Japanese women came to America as "picture brides" for Japanese men, but men outnumbered women by three to one, making it difficult for a Japanese man to find a wife.²⁰ The Gentlemen's Agreement did not achieve its aim of limiting the Japanese population because those immigrants fortunate enough to marry had large families upon becoming settled.

In 1905, the Asiatic Exclusion League formed in San Francisco, and in 1906, the city segregated East Asian students from whites in the city schools.²¹ Increasing discrimination and the 1907 earthquake and fire hastened the movement of Japanese to Southern California. Approximately 500 Japanese immigrants lived in Los Angeles County at this time.²²

Immediately prior to the founding of GVBC, California's 1913 Alien Land Law sought to undermine Japanese financial success in agriculture and banned Japanese nationals from owning property or from leasing land for more than a three-year period. The law deemed Japanese "aliens ineligible to



1915 GVBC Christmas

citizenship.”²³ To circumvent this discriminatory law, Japanese families began buying land in the name of their Nisei children—the first generation of Japanese born in America.²⁴

In 1922, not content with the Gentlemen’s Agreement and the Alien Land Law, the United States Congress amended a 1917 immigration law to threaten Caucasians who married Japanese with the loss of citizenship.²⁵ A 1921 Los Angeles Times article notes that Dr. Margaret Farr, a physician working in the Los Angeles County Health Department, lost her position because she married Dr. James Hatsuji Hara, a Moneta physician. The article notes that her father (a Baptist minister) disowned her saying he preferred to see her dead.

The passage of the Japanese Exclusion Act by the U.S. Congress in 1924 prevented all Japanese from permanent immigration.²⁶ The nation of Japan bristled at this legislation, seeing it for what it was—an affront to Japanese people. Japan’s military adventures abroad further worsened relations between the two countries, which completely deteriorated as World War II approached.

Dr. Fox and the Baptist City Missions Society

By 1860, the Baptist publication *The Evangel* counted sixty-five Baptist churches in California as well as a, “growing spirit of concord...fraternal fellowship, and hearty cooperation,” among ministers and churches.²⁷ Less unified than official publications might indicate, Baptists split over the issue of slavery, as did the nation during the Civil War. The Southern Baptist Convention formed in 1845 and accepted the institution of slavery. The Northern Baptist Churches formed their own coalition in 1907 and in 1950 adopted the name “American Baptist Convention.”²⁸

In California, Baptist work moved from north to south with the founding of the San Francisco Baptist Association in 1850, the first year of California statehood.²⁹ Baptists arrived in Southern California in 1852 and planted the first Protestant church in El Monte in 1853.³⁰

Baptists across the country can be credited with missionary zeal. California Baptists made a concerted effort to reach the immigrant Chinese population. In 1848, *The Placer Times* recorded the first three Chinese immigrants to enter San Francisco. By 1853, California held 30,000 Chinese immigrants who came to meet the demand for miners and railroad

workers. Strategic in their missionary vision, the Far West Committee of the Baptist Home Missions Society recognized the influx of Chinese as “a field for missionary effort such as God opens to His people but once in centuries.”³¹

Dr. James B. Fox, superintendent of the Los Angeles Baptist City Missions Society (LABCMS), held a strategic missionary vision when he united his organization to the work of Japanese Christian ministers in Southern California, specifically Moneta. Other Baptist organizations share credit in launching the mission work at Moneta, as referenced in the twenty-fifth anniversary publication of the Japan Baptist Union, Japanese Baptists in Southern California are Marching On, but Fox can rightly be called the father of GVBC.

Dr. James Fox Personal History

James Fox hailed from Oakland, Michigan, born in 1867, one of five children of Peter and Eliza Fox. The family earned their keep by farming. In 1899, James married Annie Jenks and moved to Massachu-

setts, and he is listed on the U.S. census as a Baptist clergyman who rented his residence.³²

The Foxes made their way to Los Angeles where Dr. Fox served as the first executive secretary of LABCMS from 1911 to 1937. In 1928, The Gardena Valley News reported Dr. Fox giving a short talk at a Vacation Bible School at Gardena Baptist Church where children made small exhibits of the countries of the world. He also dedicated a Mexican American Baptist Church in Los Angeles in 1936.³³ Dr. Fox died April 2, 1956, while still a resident of Los Angeles. GVBC owes much to his vision and leadership. Many in GVBC knew Dr. Fox’s children, Mary Lou Fox Gady, and her Husband Don Gady. Current Senior Pastor Steve Langley counts Don Gady, his former math teacher, a personal mentor.

Documents Related to GVBC

LABCMS, now titled the American Baptist Churches of Los Angeles (ABCLA), graciously supplied documents dating back to 1919. What history we know prior to the first church building,



1919 GVBC Building Dedication



Moneta Japanese Baptist Church (GVBC) Girls Group, 1920's

dedicated September 28, 1919, comes mostly from the book *Japanese Baptists in Southern California are Marching On*. Unfortunately, GVBC's pre-World War II documents went missing because of the hasty evacuation of Japanese Americans to internment camps during World War II. Although the search for the church's archive continues, it may never be found.

The American Baptist Home Missions Office (ABHMS) and the Los Angeles Baptist City Mission Society (LABCMS) shared the costs for GVBC's first church building and called it the "Moneta Japanese Mission."³⁴ An August 11, 1919, letter from Dr. Fox to a D.D. Proper of ABHMS describes the nature of the mission work: "This work is being done in a Japanese Colony, which we do not regard as a permanent settlement. We are placing this fine equipment [the first church building] in the midst of the colony of about 2500 population, exclusively Japanese, and we expect to do an intensive work among them while they are here, and the door is open to us."³⁵

Dr. Fox's remarks read almost humorously, given the fact GVBC stands only half a mile from where it began on the corner of Gardena Boulevard and Dalton Avenue. Neither LABCMS nor long-term attendees of the church could have foreseen the longevity of GVBC. Among those interviewed for this history, opinion differs as to whether a 100-year-old church in Gardena is remarkable, since there are churches in the United States nearly 300 years old. Every church faces challenges, but only

Japanese American congregations would experience an uprooting and replanting courtesy of the United States Government.

A July 15, 1919, letter from Dr. Fox to Dr. Divine of ABHMS thanks him for his organization's financial support and states enthusiastically, "Our Japanese are now worshipping at our splendid new mission plant in Moneta, and they are a proud, happy lot, I can tell you!" Correspondence between the two Baptist agencies indicates LABCMS supplied the majority of funds for GVBC's first building, and ABHMS played a smaller financial role.

A corresponding September 26, 1919, article in the now defunct Torrance Herald newspaper describes the dedication of the first building, "Located on the corner of Massachusetts and Gladstone streets" (today's Gardena Boulevard and Dalton Avenue). Written in the first person, the article provides a brief history of the work, but the author is not named or the clipping is missing this all-important detail. It appears a Caucasian minister wrote it as he was "appointed by the Southern California Baptist Convention to work among the Japanese of Southern California."³⁶ He notes that services started in Moneta using two tables and two-dozen chairs supplied by Dr. Fox, and the program included singing and Bible stories for the children.

GVBC fittingly began as an outreach to children and today boasts a reputation for outstanding children's ministries, especially the Vacation Bible

School (VBS), which takes place during one week in summer. During the 2000s, the VBS leaders turned away volunteers due to the overwhelming number they received and because the volunteers outnumbered the children. This wonderful enthusiasm among the members illustrates, true to the church's founding, that youth ministry remains a hallmark of GVBC.

The Moneta Japanese Baptist Church

All of the short histories written about Gardena Valley Baptist Church—and there are several anonymous versions—repeat the same basic facts of its founding, and some also note that GVBC began the work of LABCMS among the Japanese in Southern California in 1914. LABCMS also planted Japanese congregations at Terminal Island in 1918, Boyle Heights in 1925 (Evergreen Los Angeles), and Pomona and Garden Grove in 1928.

The first church service took place in a small,

rented home in Moneta with about twenty children attending a Sunday school class taught by GVBC's first minister, Pastor Haruye Shibata (1914-1918).³⁷ The first building belonging to GVBC—a small barn—came as a gift from an unnamed “older woman” in 1916 who attended Gardena Baptist Church.³⁸ Young men from the mission moved it to the back of the rented cottage and fitted it for Sunday school classes, church services, and social gatherings.³⁹

In a 1905 Department of Commerce and Labor document entitled “Oath to Inward Passengers”—a passenger manifest from a Japanese ship bound from Yokohama—a 20-year old, single man by the name of H. Shibata brought two bags aboard. Though a tantalizing clue, it cannot be said with certainty if this was GVBC's first pastor. He appears to have landed at Callao (Lima, Peru) while some on the ship landed at Balboa, Panama, but the document does not list their final destinations.



1917 Moneta Japanese Church Young Men's Fellowship

Top Row: unknown, Tamaki Nakahira, Zensuke Nishino (Secretary), Uichiro Yumikura, Tsunetaro Ogawa, Ichitaro Taniguchi, Yasuhei Sakai
 Middle Row: Jyogiro Moritomo (Vice-President), Rev. Shiraishi, Rev. Shibata, Masao Taketani (President), Shigenori Ihira, Shigemitsu Yamadsa
 Bottom Row: Shiro Kunitsugu, unknown, Aigi Hashii, unknown, unknown, Kamezo Suzuki, Ushimatsu Matsuoka

Pastor Shibata's name first appears in the Southern California public record in a 1918 Los Angeles Times article. The article identifies him as the leader of the newly dedicated East San Pedro Japanese Mission, which included the Japanese Social Center at Fish Harbor.⁴⁰ A 1920 Los Angeles City Directory confirms this title. His ministry took him beyond Gardena to other Japanese communities in the South Bay area, and he is listed as the pioneer pastor in "most of the Japanese Baptist Missions in Southern California."⁴¹

The practice of ministering to more than one part of the body of Christ occurred frequently among



The Moneta Japanese Mission Sunday School Bus, Year Unknown.

pre-war Japanese ministers. Pastor Paul Nagano described his early forays into youth ministry in the 1930s. He served GVBC as bus driver and Sunday school teacher, but he traveled widely to serve the other Japanese Baptist churches in Southern California.⁴²

In August of 1939, GVBC's second pastor, Kiyoshi Thomas Shiraishi, penned the forward to *Japanese Baptists in Southern California are Marching On*. This publication of the Japan Baptist Union commemorated the twenty-fifth anniversary of mission work among Japanese. A well-educated man and gifted writer, Shiraishi hearkened back to early GVBC meetings in the kitchen of a farmhouse. He then mentioned the buildings dedicated at Fish Harbor and Moneta. He used the term *Yobiyose Seinen*—young men who were "summoned" to Christ from lives of drinking and gambling—who led the work of sharing the Gospel with Japanese.⁴³ At the time of GVBC's first building dedication, approximately 7000 Japanese lived within a five-mile radius of Moneta, with 1000 Japanese students in the local public schools.⁴⁴

A September 22, 1920, letter from the superintendent of LABCMS to a "Brother Jones"—a Baptist worker desiring to support the outreach among Japanese—notes that Pastor Shibata had "two fine [mission] fields," one at the San Pedro Harbor and the other in Moneta. At the time of the writing of the letter, Pastor Shibata was in Japan, and Pastor Shiraishi was "doing his best while Shibata is gone." In the same letter, the superintendent also notes forty to fifty conversions among the Japanese in the previous year, marking an effective work of evangelism in the South Bay.

A GVBC Issei Story

Though no living GVBC member knew Pastor Shibata, his legacy is felt within the church today. Alice Miyake's grandfather, Kamezo "Leo" Suzuki, came to faith—and to GVBC—as a direct result of Shibata's outreach.⁴⁵ What follows comes from Kamezo's unpublished autobiography translated by the family from tape recordings. Born in 1889 in Nakajo-Machi, Japan, Kamezo hailed from a family of eight children. His family farmed until he started grade school and lived with his grandparents in their small home. Kamezo's father, Takichi, sailed to the Kingdom of Hawaii in 1903 to work in the sugar cane fields with other immigrants. A year later Takichi headed for America and lived as a vagabond, traveling with his bedroll and finding work on the railroad or farms from San Francisco to Los Angeles.

Eleven years after he immigrated to America, Takichi requested that his son Kamezo join him. Already an adventurous traveler within Japan, Kamezo heeded his father's request. The day before Kamezo left Japan, his aunt, uncle, and mother joined him in Yokohama at the Kumamoto Hotel. They shared a drink together to wish Kamezo good luck on his journey. As he stood on the deck of the *Tenyo-Maru*, Kamezo began to have doubts about the journey. When he bade his mother goodbye, he vowed he would return to Japan within three years. He would never see his mother again.

Though Kamezo was overcome by seasickness and remorse aboard ship, kind strangers comforted him. A Mr. Hasegawa gave him a basket of fruit, one of

the few things he ate during the eleven-day journey. Upon landing in Hawaii, Kamezo and his traveling companion, Oseta, stayed with Oseta's uncle. The next day, they sailed for San Francisco, landing eleven days later, December 16, 1914, a few months after the first meeting of Gardena Valley Baptist Church.

The ship landed at Angel Island, and the immigrants aboard were quarantined for five days before Kamezo would see his father's face for the first time in many years. They stayed at the Kumamoto Boarding House in San Francisco. The next day, they sailed to San Pedro in Los Angeles Harbor. Kamezo and his father went to downtown Los Angeles to buy clothing for Kamezo. Those aboard ship identified him as a Salvation Army worker because he wore his school uniform from Japan. After shopping, Kamezo and his father rode the red electric streetcar to Vermont Avenue in Gardena.

Takichi grew strawberries near Normandie and Torrance Boulevards on a small farm and joined with other Japanese families for meals and social activities. Kamezo celebrated his first New Year's Eve in America in 1915. At 16 years old, Kamezo needed to go to school, so he began attending Moneta Grammar School located on 162nd Street, one block east of Western Avenue. Knowing no English, Kamezo began in the primary grades and was promoted to the fourth grade after only twenty days.

In February of 1916, Kamezo joined Pastor Shibata's class. GVBC's first pastor taught English language lessons and introduced the Japanese to Christianity. Kamezo remembered Pastor Shibata giving him a small Bible. As he recounted, "I saw hope for my future."⁴⁶ He accepted Christ and was baptized in 1917 at the age of seventeen. Alice Miyake continues in the faith of her father, Kamezo, serving at GVBC today, having contributed valuable information to this history.

Pastor K.T. Shiraishi History

Of the current and former GVBC members interviewed for this book, only Harold Kobata offered a few memories of Pastor Shiraishi and his daughters, Grace and Ruth, who joined the Girl's Fellowship and are pictured in a 1950s photo with other young

women at GVBC. This year GVBC also received an anecdotal personal history of Shiraishi's life and ministry. He immigrated to the United States from Japan in 1917 to pursue his religious education while working as houseboy for four dollars per day.⁴⁷ He ministered at the East San Pedro mission from 1917-1918 before joining the work in Gardena. When GVBC dedicated its first chapel in 1919, Shiraishi held the reins of leadership and ministered until 1921. He would return to GVBC in 1940 and then again in 1945 to help rebuild the church.⁴⁸

Life and Work in Gardena

During the early twentieth century in Gardena, Japanese immigrants cultivated strawberries and other berry crops. The May 9, 1911, Los Angeles Times wrote that 425 acres in Gardena grew strawberries, with 3000 Japanese harvesting the crop, producing 2500 crates of fruit per day. Sadly, the article used the pejorative "Jap" more than once. The annual Strawberry Festival began at about the same time GVBC was founded. The Japanese community donated 150 crates of strawberries for refreshments and joined into the festivities by riding in decorated buggies in the parade.⁴⁹

Soil depletion and urbanization ended Gardena's strawberry boom and forced some Japanese to leave Gardena to work in other nearby agricultural communities such as Torrance and Inglewood. Pioneering immigrants left agriculture altogether to open shops and other businesses. Japanese language schools, known as Gakuens, formed in the community, sometimes meeting in homes. The Issei in Gardena saw the promise of belonging to a thriving agricultural community, and those who worshiped at GVBC found identity and community in an often-hostile world.

CHAPTER ONE

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CHAPTER TWO
Growing Roots: 1922—1939





Moneta Japanese Baptist Church circa 1927

GROWING ROOTS: 1922-1939

In 1922 Gardena, Henry Huntington’s Los Angeles Rail Company added more cars to the Moneta Trolley Line to ease congestion. In 1928, the local Humpty Dumpty Market sold three boxes of Kellogg’s corn flakes for twenty-two cents, and the Torrance Theater showed Tom Mix’s *Daredevil’s Reward*. At GVBC, Pastor Kumao Egami replaced Pastor Shibata, who transitioned away from GVBC to concentrate on the Japanese fishing village in San Pedro.

Little documentation exists about Pastor Egami and his successor Pastor Paul Watanabe, which is also the case with GVBC as a whole between 1919 and about 1928. What we do know is that GVBC ministered sacrificially to the Gardena Japanese Community, and the church reached out to the youngest members of the community.

GVBC Under Pastor Wada

Pastor Masahiko and Kuni Wada ministered at GVBC from July 1929 to 1940. The Baptist denomi-

nation described Pastor Wada as “tireless in his effort to spread the Gospel among the Japanese people in this widely opened field of Gardena, Compton, Torrance, Hawthorne, and Redondo.”¹ Prior to their time at GVBC, the Wadas ministered to Japanese agriculture workers in Garden Grove and Pomona.

After 1873, the Meiji government in Japan sent its best and brightest abroad to learn of the West. The first visitors came from the Samurai class—the highest-ranking class after the Emperor and his relatives. Samurai represented just seven percent of the Japanese population. Instead of traveling by steerage, as did many immigrants to America, they traveled first class. Some early Christian converts in Japan belonged to the Samurai class, including Pastor Masahiko Wada, born August 9, 1880, in Sendai, Japan.

Mr. and Mrs. C.H. Ross partnered with the Wadas in ministry from 1929 as the Directors of Young People.¹ *The Gardena Valley News* announced a

Front row l-r #1 Mrs. Wada, #2 Mrs. Ross, #3 Mrs. Takeno, #5 Mrs. Kuida
 #6 May Yanaga Koga, #7 May Yamauchi, #9 Muts Yanaga
 Back row l-r #2 Sam Ishihara, #3 Rev. Ross, #5, Rev. Wada, #6 Paul Koga
 GVBC SS Teachers c. 1938



1930's GVBC Sunday School Teachers

talk the Rosses gave to the Lions Club around 1930, in which they detailed their twenty-three years of missionary service in Japan, which included a stint teaching in government schools and working with the Baptist Board of Foreign Missions. This vital life experience no doubt equipped them for their work at GVBC.

Of those people interviewed for this history, some credit excellent leadership for the longevity of GVBC. Mitchell Homma, the great-great-grandson of Pastor Wada, notes that GVBC had a reputation among American Baptist Churches for raising up leaders like Wada. Though he was equal in importance to all who held the reins of leadership, we know a good deal more about Pastor Wada's history than others who preceded him.

What follows comes from the Wada family history, prepared by Mitchell Homma:

Born to a strict Buddhist family and trained under a Buddhist monk, Masahiko studied law at Tokyo University. He first encountered Christianity through a young girl dressed as an angel, crying on the

street corner because she was late for a church play. Masahiko escorted her to her performance. Through this experience he became interested in Christianity and later came to faith while attending a Salvation Army Bible study.

Masahiko's conversion cost him dearly, as his father asked him to leave the family as a consequence. When his father died, the surviving family members forbade Masahiko from attending his father's funeral.

Masahiko then attended the American Baptist Seminary at Yokohama, graduating in 1906. He joined Japanese soldiers stationed in Japan-occupied Russia, Korea, and Manchuria, seeking to spread the Gospel as a volunteer, working for the Japanese chapter of the YMCA. He stood out uncomfortably at times, wearing the YMCA uniform, and refusing to imbibe strong drink with the soldiers.

Upon returning to Japan from Korea, Masahiko married Kuni Anazawa in 1909. The Wadas worked for the YMCA in Korea for five years where their son Michiko (Mike) was born. The YMCA at this time ministered through evangelistic meetings, by

publishing and lending Christian literature, and by holding public talks on philosophical subjects. The Wadas later transferred to Siberia for several years to reach out to Japanese soldiers stationed there.

The GVBC Youth Ministry

Pastor and Mrs. Wada modeled GVBC's Sunday school after the famous Kure school in Japan, which gave Bible lessons in English. Youth ministry flourished under their leadership, and they dedicated a new youth facility in 1932. GVBC possessed the same creative energy toward youth ministry as it does today. The American Baptist document archives contain a typed, double-spaced proposal for a youth clubhouse to be built by the church. Whether it came to fruition is not known, but the vision for an excellent program is clearly evidenced. As with most Japanese American pastors, Reverend Wada's work was cut short and his world turned upside down by the relocation of Japanese Americans in 1942.

The YMCA and GVBC

In 1844, George Williams and eleven friends founded the Young Men's Christian Association as a refuge for prayer and Bible study for young men on industrial London's perilous streets.² Designed to provide organized activities and also to counter

negative influences, the "Y Clubs" crossed the ocean, eventually reaching Los Angeles in 1882 with its first branch located downtown on Spring Street.³ One of twenty-five branches founded in the Los Angeles area, the Y Club in Gardena still exists, but looks a lot different seventy-five years later.

Caucasian Protestant ministers during the early twentieth century—GVBC leadership included—held the most racially progressive attitudes in America. In his 1990 doctoral dissertation entitled *For the Sake of Our Japanese Brethren*, Dr. Brian Hayashi highlights the efforts of Protestant Christian organizations in the United States to assimilate Asian immigrants. For example, the Gospel Society taught the U.S. Constitution, politics and government, and the singing of Western hymns.⁴ The 1919 *Holly Leaves* newspaper from Hollywood advertised a talk by Dr. James Fox entitled, "Americanization Right Here in Los Angeles."⁵ The same paper featured opinion pieces openly hostile to immigrant groups. The City Missions Society believed in assimilating Los Angeles immigrant groups, and apparently it proved an effective tool in evangelism.

American Baptist ministers transcended prevailing prejudice toward the Japanese in California. They sought to unite Asian and Caucasian brothers and



GVBC Men's Group 1930's



Kimono Day at GVBC, c. 1930.
Ms. Mutsu Wada (left) Mrs. C.H. Ross (center) May Yamuchi (right)

sisters under the Christian banner and to promote goodwill and understanding between the two groups. Mrs. Ross donned a kimono on Kimono Day to affirm the culture of the Japanese of Moneta. Pastor Ross led the Southwest Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) group at GVBC, called the Cardinals Y

Club, beginning about 1936.

Jack Garner, former Gardena YMCA attender, penned a short history of his experiences in this group. He remembers Japanese and Caucasian youth playing basketball and touch football together. Three boys clubs comprised the larger Y Club: The Friendly Indians, for boys aged nine to eleven; The Pioneers, for twelve to fourteen-year-olds; and The Comrades for fifteen to eighteen-year-olds.

Mr. Garner notes that the leaders of the Cardinals Y Club sought a fifty-fifty mix of Asian and Caucasian youth. Typical of young people, "none of us had any prejudice. I don't imagine we even knew what the word meant..."⁶ The Y Club offered young people a place to compete in sports before Little League Baseball and Pop Warner Football existed in the area, and it also sponsored a ten-day summer camp at Little Green Valley Lake, between Lake Arrowhead and Big Bear Lake. Vivid in Jack's memory, his friend Mim Yoshida saved him from drowning in Green Valley Lake one hot summer day.⁷ Harold Kobata also remembers his Cardinal Y Club years as some of the best times he ever had at GVBC, though Harold and Jack do not recall meeting one another. Friendships formed regardless of race, and GVBC swam against the tide of the broader culture.



Front Row L-R: Elton Randolph, Harold Kobata, Yutaka Shiraishi, Toshima, Ed Kobata, Frank Kuida, Rev. C.H. Ross
Back Row: Bob Watson, Bill Eagle, Jim Boyle, Hippo Kuida, Jim Randolph, Yo Minami, Shinya Honda, Henry Ishihara c. 1940

Pastor Jitsuo Morikawa

Jitsuo Morikawa stands as one of the more famous and dynamic Japanese pastors who served at GVBC. Prior to his call, Morikawa visited Los Angeles-area Japanese churches from his home in Canada. After hearing him speak, Dr. Ralph Mayberry, GVBC's father figure after World War II, passionately desired him to lead the Los Angeles Nisei. Dr. Mayberry made multiple trips to the Department of Immigration in Washington D.C. to bring Morikawa to GVBC, finally succeeding in 1940.⁸

Mayberry's feat occurred during an increasingly hostile climate toward the Japanese in America, with the specter of war with Japan on the horizon. A close personal friend of the Morikawas, Dr. Mayberry later officiated at the wedding of Morikawa and his bride Hazel Takii.⁹

As with other previous GVBC pastors, ABHMS assigned Morikawa to work at three locations: Terminal Island, Boyle Heights, and GVBC.¹⁰ World War II and the internment of West Coast Japanese in 1942 cut short Morikawa's tenure.

In a biography written by his widow Hazel, an interesting profile of Morikawa emerges. A minister (and his wife), "had little privacy, was almost church property, was usually penny-poor, was an object of criticism, and knew only a busy life of constant service."¹¹

In addition to shepherding the congregations, the minister reported to the American Baptist governing bodies such as LABCMS.

Through the lens of individualistic American culture, one might wonder what made men and women choose to serve as ministers given the accompanying poverty and stress. He likely felt honored to be sensei (teacher) to a group of devoted followers and, furthermore, to shepherd the Body of Christ. The theme of the beleaguered and exhausted Japanese American minister would later recur among GVBC pastors.

In interviews for this book, Dr. Paul Nagano, former minister at GVBC, he repeatedly exclaimed



Jitsuo Morikawa with Mrs. Wada and Rev. Wada

that Jitsuo Morikawa was his personal hero. He mentioned several times being inspired by Morikawa's "universalism." According to Hazel Takii Morikawa's biography of Jitsuo, and Dr. Nagano's introduction to a bound series of Morikawa's sermons, it appears that Jitsuo and Dr. Nagano departed from the Christian orthodoxy of salvation by faith in Christ alone. Though Morikawa did not embrace the moniker "universalist," he felt that his Buddhist mother, who never confessed Christ as her savior, "was surrounded by God's grace and mercy; surely she too bore some likeness of the Heavenly Father from whom we have all come, and to whom we should all return."¹² Pastor Morikawa and Dr. Nagano would both become heavily involved in ecumenism, and Nagano embraced Japanese religious involvement, Christian or otherwise. In the opinion of the writer, the "psychic wound" of Japanese internment described by Morikawa, Nagano, and others led these men to embrace all things Japanese, which included some theology that was not biblical.



Moneta Japanese Baptist Church circa 1927

CHAPTER TWO

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1930 GVBC Sunday School

CHAPTER THREE
War and Relocation: 1940—1945





Poston Camp 1943

WAR AND RELOCATION: 1940—1945

In contrast to World War I, World War II defined the twentieth-century for Japanese Americans living on the West Coast. President Franklin D. Roosevelt issued Executive Order 9066 on February 19, 1942, which incarcerated most GVBC members as part of the 120,000 Japanese Americans detained in ten so-called internment camps until the war's end. Some 11,000 German Americans, and several hundred Italian Americans suffered the same fate.

In November of 1945, the Los Angeles Baptist City Missions Society (LABCMS) sold the church property on 16400 Dalton Avenue to the Christian Missionary Society for \$3,919.14. *A Short History of Gardena Valley Baptist Church* describes the incarceration as “the exile years,” in which “all seemed lost.”

A Psychic Wound

Forgiveness by incarcerated Japanese Americans would be required to move on from the degradation of the camp years: forgiveness for the loss of

basic human dignity in the Assembly Centers and camps, for the separating of families, for the loss of productive working years, the loss of property, and perhaps most difficult, the need to question one's identity and loyalty to America. At about the time of the Pearl Harbor bombing, former GVBC minister Dr. Paul Nagano recalls, “I was eating a late lunch in Gardena. A Caucasian man came up to me, looked me in my eye, and called me a ‘damn Jap.’ I had no idea why he was so angry. He started pushing me and we broke into a scuffle until the restaurant owner stopped us. Then he turned on the radio and I heard the words, ‘We are at war.’”¹

At the time, Paul slept in a room provided by GVBC but also ministered at the San Pedro and Terminal Island churches. A military checkpoint greeted him as he attempted to report for work at the harbor. He carried his Bible and message notes with him, and he was eventually able to convince the guard to let him pass.² The evacuation raised

fundamental questions of justice and identity for Nagano. He asked himself “As a third generation citizen of the United States, why was I incarcerated in a concentration camp in my own country? Who am I, a Japanese or an American? Where do I belong?”³

In *Looking Like the Enemy*, Mary Matsuda Gruenewald notes that when she was a child growing up in Washington State, her parents told her, “What you think about yourself is not nearly as important as what others think about you.”⁴ The hatred and rejection of the Japanese by white Americans inflicted deep wounds upon a people who prized the approval of others. Gruenewald goes on to say, “I had a terrible guilt by association, but there was no way that I could change my skin color, my eyes, my straight black hair, or my name. Shame and self-loathing framed my sense of self. Yet, that’s the way it was—I looked like the enemy.”⁵ This identity crisis would visit many internees to varying degrees.

The evacuation of Japanese Americans proceeded with much haste, and unfortunately the assembly centers and camps were crude and dehumanizing places. More than one person interviewed for this history mentioned the livestock smells at the Santa Anita and Tulare Assembly centers—converted livestock pens. The dust and bitter cold blowing through the cracks of the camp barracks in the Manzanar and Amache Internment Camps is another well-documented theme. These messages, if internalized, could lead to feelings of second-class citizenship.

The evacuation inflicted another blow by stealing the careers and financial standing of many Issei men. Sohei Kakehashi and his wife, Betty Adachi’s parents, ran a bustling market at the corner of Western Avenue and Redondo Beach Boulevard in Gardena. Nearly at retirement age at the time of the evacuation, the Kakehashis could not start over in the grocery business.⁶

Richard and Howard Imatomi’s father entered camp at age thirty-eight, in the prime of his income-bearing years. The loss of his position and future economic opportunity left him embittered. He returned to Southern California to finish his career in manufacturing and in the nursery business, which

were not his chosen vocations. The years that the locusts had eaten haunted him for the rest of his days.⁷

In *Centennial Legacy*, a book recounting ministry to Japanese in the United States, Dr. Lester Suzuki summarized the psychic wound to the Japanese: “We were confused, hurt, and discouraged . . . housed in horse stalls. . . toilet facilities which were so distasteful. . . eating in mess halls.”⁸ Being uniquely singled out for mistreatment caused some to question their own identity and their place in society.

The Bombing of Pearl Harbor

An explosion occurred, literally and figuratively, when the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941. On that day, any hope among Japanese Americans to live a normal and peaceful life disappeared. Though the Issei entered an anti-Japanese America, Pearl Harbor bred a state of near anti-Japanese hysteria.

Less than a month after the bombing, *The Los Angeles Times* reported, the County Defense Council had already ordered the rounding up and detention of Japanese, Germans, and Italians if they were unable to prove United States citizenship.⁹

The logic behind interment, as stated by the *Times* article, was to “remove the perils of sabotage and espionage” from the areas of vital defense industry on the West Coast of the United States.¹⁰ A few paragraphs later the article quotes Los Angeles Supervisor William A. Smith: “This is the only country where enemy aliens are allowed to roam at will. I think the only answer to the problem is internment.”¹¹

President Franklin Roosevelt issued Executive Order 9066 two weeks after the *Times* article ran. Executive Order 9066 authorized the Secretary of War to designate certain areas as military zones to exclude individuals at the discretion of the Military Commander.

In *Democracy On Trial*, Paige Smith underlines the idea that many Issei Japanese feared for their safety and viewed the incarceration as being placed in protective custody by the government.¹² In spite of being interned, some at GVBC share Smith’s controversial interpretation. Smith rightly identifies the danger to Japanese Americans. After the war ended,

a hateful person fired shots into the Livingston, California home of Stanley Yoshino, the father-in-law of this writer. Sadly, such incidents occurred with some regularity. However, the government denied Japanese American citizens the right to choose either freedom or protective custody.

Immediately prior to Pearl Harbor, Curtis B. Munson, special representative of the U.S. State Department, wrote a report about the loyalty of Japanese Americans in Hawaii and on the West Coast. The report drew the unequivocal conclusion, “There is no Japanese problem.”¹³ Pre-existing prejudice in the country—combined with government-produced anti-Japanese propaganda—created a shrill public outcry that could not be ignored by politicians.

Nisei men, who fought for the 442nd Regimental Combat Team while their families were incarcerated, proved their loyalty to the United States beyond a shadow of a doubt. They would become the most decorated infantry regiment in the history of the United States Army.

On December 8, 1944, the United States Supreme

Court ruled that the evacuation of American Japanese was a constitutional action, but loyal Nisei could not be prevented from returning to their homes. In the words of dissenting Justice J. Jackson, “Security is like liberty in that many crimes are committed in its name.”¹⁴ With regard to the evacuation of the American Japanese, the statement certainly holds true.

Pearl Harbor and Hawaiian GVBCers

On the whole, Hawaiian Japanese fared better during the war than their mainland counterparts. The government declared martial law and detained some 1200 persons.¹⁵ Several hundred influential Japanese spent time at the Sand Island Detention Center in Oahu Harbor.¹⁶ Some who had lived in Hawaii prior to the bombing of Pearl Harbor would later join GVBC.

As a young boy, Matt Miyaguchi grew up about three miles south of the east lock of Pearl Harbor—where the bombs fell. Matt and other youngsters gathered up some of the rations and unwittingly



“Manzanar Storm”, Year Unknown

played with the ammunition they found. Sometimes they found cans of spam. Matt wonders if the errant supply drops introduced Spam to Hawaii—meat greatly loved by Hawaiians today.

Elsie Hirota, also from Oahu, remembers her family being confined to their neighborhood after the Pearl Harbor bombing. The military also restricted access to nearby beaches. She saw the Japanese planes going over their house and out to sea. She believed the United States military was conducting a drill, until she saw the rising suns on the plane wings. Some in her neighborhood sustained minor injuries from flying shrapnel.¹⁷

A very young girl in Oahu at the time, Ruth Kawai remembers her Portuguese neighbors shunning her and calling her names after the bombing. Her mother explained that ignorance prompted the neighbor's hostility toward the Japanese.¹⁸

The United States Government required Japanese families in Hawaii to relinquish Japanese symbols such as swords, flags, and pictures of the emperor. Ruth cried as her mother burned their memorabilia rather than having it confiscated.¹⁹

As a young girl on Maui, Suzanne Hasegawa also saw the Japanese planes pass overhead. A dud bomb landed in the rice bags in her uncle's store across from the railroad station on Oahu. The government detained Suzanne's grandfather at the Sand Island detention facility because he was an influential business leader. Suzanne's family lived near the Maui ice works and an armed guard stood right behind their home. If the guard heard them speaking in Japanese, he yelled, "English only!" Since her grandmother spoke very little English, Suzanne thought this was an unreasonable demand.²⁰

Helene Shimane remembers blackening out the windows on their home to avoid becoming bomb targets and building a bomb shelter where they could store emergency food and water. Her father taught school and was interviewed by the government to establish his loyalty to America. He passed the interrogation and avoided incarceration.²¹

Other Camp Experiences

To view more lengthy testimonies of the camp experiences of GVBC members and former members, see the 1998 book entitled *Triumphs of Faith: Stories of Japanese-American Christians During World War II* (AISN#B000BN3BWK). *Triumphs* includes testimonies by GVBCers Dr. Paul Nagano, Pastor Roy Ishihara, Frances Kaji, and Molly Nishimoto. What follows here are a few stories gleaned mostly from audio interviews conducted for this history.

Molly Nishimoto

The Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) conducted an evacuation of Japanese from Molly's neighborhood in Vancouver, Canada at the same time the United States government evacuated Japanese. The RCMP built about 1000 temporary homes to house the Japanese, essentially reconstructing a ghost-mining town. Molly's sister's hospitalization led to Molly meeting Harumi Nishimoto, a young man suffering from tuberculosis in the same hospital. As a patient, Harumi managed to lead Bible studies that Molly attended. A friendship grew between them, which blossomed to romance, and the Nishimotos married in 1947.²²

Frances Kaji

Frances Kaji received a keepsake Bible at age fourteen when Pastor Wada baptized her. She rediscovered the Bible on the eve of the evacuation of Japanese Americans from Gardena. "That was a bewildering time. We didn't know what was going on! And, you just went along with your parents and they were under the government's orders to do this [evacuate], no questions asked."²³

Frances's family lost most of their possessions. "My dad told us to pack up as we would be moving to Fresno." Frances cannot remember why they spent several months in Fresno, although many passed through the Tulare Assembly Center near there. The government separated the family because Frances's father was ill with tuberculosis, and he would spend time in a sanatorium. The rest of the family ended up in camp at Poston, Arizona.²⁴

Prior to the evacuation, Frances's father worked as

a country doctor in Gardena. Because of his illness, he could not manage the responsibilities as head of the household. His patients interceded to help Frances's mother to transport her goods and to take care of other family needs.²⁵

When leaving camp, Frances and her family heard about some Japanese families returning to Gardena. Umeno Kobata, Harold's mother, was a friend of the family and had been a lay leader at GVBC. The church began to regather, and Frances and her family rejoined the brothers and sisters, but not before living in Denver, Colorado and in the Boyle Heights neighborhood of Los Angeles near Evergreen Baptist Church.²⁶

Frances and her husband Bruce became an integral part of the church. Bruce, as a business leader in Gardena, encouraged the church to accumulate property and expand the facilities. Many who lived through the camp experience did not share his risk-taking tendencies as they had lost all of their property and income and did not want to find themselves in the same position again. Great faith would be required to stretch the reach of the church beyond the small nucleus that gathered after the war.²⁷

Frank Nakamura

"I was too young to remember camp experience and my parents did not talk about it in any depth."²⁸ The Nakamura family spent the internment years in Rohwer, Arkansas. They stayed in Arkansas after being released from camp and made a life farming vegetables in a small town near Little Rock. The experiences that wounded Frank the most were the taunts and put-downs from other school children. However, some of Frank's peers showed great kindness, as did some of his teachers who encouraged him to work hard and obey his parents. "I have been blessed by the lessons learned from this difficult experience throughout my life."²⁹

Tak Shimazaki

The Shimazaki family lived near Western Avenue and Redondo Beach Boulevard in Gardena. Hiroshi "Harry" Shimazaki, Tak's father, ran Shimazaki Studios, a successful photography shop in Gardena. Because of the impending evacuation, Harry sold

his cameras and equipment at fire-sale prices. Tak's mother actually gave birth to him while they were held in the Santa Anita Assembly Center—a converted horse stable. They spent three years in the relocation camp at Rohwer, Arkansas.

The Shimazaki family settled in downtown Los Angeles to begin their lives again after the war. The loss of his business proved too great a setback for Harry. He would retire soon after returning. Tak notes that his parents rarely spoke of their experiences in camp and chose to look forward, not wanting to relive this difficult chapter.³⁰

Richard and Howard Imatomi

Twin brothers Richard and Howard Imatomi began their internment experience at the tender age of three. Because they were so young, they lived in a relative state of innocence. They did not know what was happening and managed to enjoy themselves while interned at Amache. Richard states, "I was in total ignorance."³¹ Howard says, "It was a fun experience for us because we just got to play a lot."³² When they left the camp in August of 1945, their family returned to California in large military trucks and by train. They received no help from military personnel who herded them into the trucks for the return trip—the most difficult part of the evacuation in Richard's memory.³³

Betty Adachi

Though older than the Imatomis and more aware of the realities of the camps, Betty Adachi did not have an entirely bitter experience. She met her future husband, John, in camp. Betty caught his eye while dining in the mess hall at Rohwer, Arkansas. He asked some of her friends to introduce them. Years later, they married after being reunited in Gardena.³⁴

Alice and Perry Miyake

After receiving the order to evacuate in 1942, Alice's family, the Suzukis, sold all of their possessions for next to nothing, including her father Kamezo's beloved painted pony. Her brother cried bitter tears as they left Gardena because he would be forced to leave behind his tricycle. They boarded the train for camp at the corner of Western and 166th Streets in

Gardena, each carrying the two suitcases allowed by the government.³⁵

Alice's mother arrived at camp seven months pregnant, taxed to her physical limit by the ordeal of the journey. The terrible dust storms in Gila, Arizona, coated everything with a fine powder and even caused many to contract Valley Fever. Alice's parents worried that they would lose Alice's newborn sister, Junko, because when she tried to cry, her voice would not come out. Kamezo ingeniously fashioned a cooler using a fan and water to cool and moisten their quarters and Junko survived! Perry Miyake spent the camp years at Rohwer, Arkansas. He remembers Pastor Shiraishi, the second minister of GVBC, riding around camp on a bicycle, inviting everyone to church services.³⁶

Protestant Ministers During the War Years

During the anti-Japanese frenzy of World War II and the internment of the Japanese, Protestant ministers again shined as some of the best citizens in the country. In 1941, Christian ministers founded The Southern California Church Federation to help the Japanese cope with rising racial tensions. They also ministered in the Assembly Centers.³⁷ The American Friends and Presbyterian Churches sponsored the Evergreen Fellowship House, a hostel in Los Angeles that provided inexpensive lodging to returning Japanese. Other churches served as hostels and also offered legal, citizenship, and employment aid.³⁸

Dr. Ralph Mayberry, the Executive Minister of the LABCMS following Dr. Fox, helped Japanese families to evacuate Terminal Island after Pearl Harbor. Dr. Mayberry even escorted Paul Nagano and Jitsuo Morikawa from the Poston camp to Phoenix, Arizona, so that Paul could be ordained as a minister. Dr. Mayberry received particular praise from Pastor Ishihara: "Dr. Mayberry represents scores of people who befriended Japanese Americans and stood up against popular sentiment to protect them against wartime hysteria."³⁹ Pastor Herbert Nicholson, who wrote an anecdotal account of his ministry entitled *Treasures in Earthen Vessels*, preached in all

ten Relocation Camps and ministered to the Japanese alongside Dr. Mayberry. Nicholson mentioned visiting

Mrs. Kuni Wada, wife of Pastor Masahiko Wada, housed in women's prison as part of the internment in Lordsburg, New Mexico.⁴⁰

We can be grateful for the unwavering witness and sense of justice represented by these men. Sadly, there are many counter narratives of self-identified Christians persecuting the Japanese during the evacuation. One man at GVBC tells the story of his father being spit on by a Caucasian camp guard who called himself a Christian. Because of this hateful act, this elderly man avoided Christianity for many years, finally coming to faith in Christ late in his life.

In 1981, GVBC hosted meetings for the Presidential Committee on Wartime Relocation and Internment. President Reagan formed this committee to determine if "any wrongs were committed in the treatment of Japanese Americans during World War II."⁴¹ Gardena City Councilman Mas Fukai spoke, as well as Lilian Nakano, a member of the National Coalition for Redress and Reparations. The United States government would pass the Civil Liberties Act in 1988 and pay reparations to incarcerated Japanese American families during the presidency of George H.W. Bush.

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CHAPTER FOUR
The Regathering of GVBC:
1946—1960





GVBC Sunday School at 7th Day Adventist Church

THE REGATHERING OF GVBC: 1946—1960

During the exile years of the church, 1942 to 1945, LABCMS sold the Dalton Avenue property and the church buildings disappeared. This must have come as a shock to those who called the church home. Where the buildings landed is unknown. The returning evacuees met in several temporary locations, beginning with Torrance First Baptist Church, and also including the Seventh Day Adventist Church on Denker Avenue near the present campus. The returning exiles rallied around Roy Ishihara. Ishihara began his vocational ministry as a missionary among Japanese in Gardena after the war.

Dr. Ralph Mayberry and his “cabinet” met at Torrance First Baptist Church to assess the state of GVBC, according to the 1946 LABCMS meeting minutes.¹ LABCMS made careful notes of who attended the meeting and whether they were Issei or Nisei.² At this time, the church held Friday evening meetings, formed a choir, published a newsletter, held Bible studies, and planned to restart the YMCA Club and Sunday school ministries.³ Dr. Mayberry stressed

the need for spiritual development in addition to athletic competitions in outreaches to the Japanese community.⁴

LABCMS hired Pastor Ishihara permanently in May of 1948 at a salary of \$175 per month on the eve of his graduation from the California Baptist Seminary, Covina. Twenty-five additional dollars of his support came from the Torrance First Baptist Church.⁵ An undated article clipped from *The Baptist News of Southern California* affirms Ishihara as a pastor at the Torrance Nisei Baptist Church and an outreach worker to the Japanese of Gardena.

Pastor Harumi Nishimoto and his wife Molly joined the church in 1950, coming from Toronto, Canada. Their arrival freed Pastor Shiraishi from the Gardena work. Given the missionary nature of GVBC, the Nishimotos could not be guaranteed a stable salary. With their faith that God would provide, and Molly’s piano teaching, they were able to make ends meet.⁶



*The Nishimotos
send you their "Harvest"
Christmas and New Year Greetings!
15807 S. Heaton Ave. Gardena, California.*

Rev. Harumi Nishimoto and Mrs. Molly Nishimoto

Post-War Growing Pains

After the war, GVBC confronted the issue of the push for the assimilation of churches. Protestant denominations in the Southland sought to integrate returning Japanese evacuees into established, Caucasian churches. GVBC rejected this idea in a February 10, 1948, meeting with Dr. Mayberry. Dr. Mayberry believed that outreach to Japanese would be more effective from Japanese congregations.⁷ Dr. Paul Nagano, in an interview for this history, described how the Japanese American identity suffered during the war. This identity needed to be positively affirmed through the gathering of Japanese Christians in their own churches.⁸

Contrasting Leadership Styles

Pastor Nishimoto and Pastor Ishihara proved a study in contrasting leadership styles. Pastor Sam Tonomura notes that in a Japanese congregation, the pastor as *Sensei* typically controls all aspects of the ministry, and his word goes unchallenged.⁹ Pastor Nishimoto did not fit this profile since his personality

was less forceful than Pastor Ishihara's. Longtime GVBC member and lay leader Richard Imatomi describes Pastor Nishimoto as a "gentle soul," and Richard's mother, Mae Imatomi, loved Nishimoto dearly even though, as a Nisei, she attended the English-speaking services.¹⁰

Molly Nishimoto remembers Pastor Ishihara as an energetic and knowledgeable young man. Ishihara and his wife Dorothy were married at GVBC in 1951. Dorothy helped Molly establish her piano-teaching business by loaning Molly piano students when the Ishiharas were traveling.¹¹ Others also praise Ishihara, including Dr. Paul Nagano, who credits him with regathering GVBC.¹²

Pastor Ishihara exerted himself in ministering to the Nisei and forming the Gardena Nisei Baptist Youth Fellowship (BYF). In a 1951 letter to Dr. Mayberry, Amy Acock, missionary worker among the Japanese in Gardena wrote, "Mr. Ishihara runs things."¹³ Apparently his personality and zeal for Nisei youth ministry irked some of the Issei. Without the pastors' knowledge, a group of seven women from GVBC wrote a letter to Dr. Mayberry in December 1951. They expressed concern that people would soon leave the church because of factionalism and



Dr. Roy Ishihara and Mrs. Dorothy Ishihara

uneven leadership. Their list of complaints included last minute cancellations of events, lack of communication, lack of financial oversight of the church, and a lack of delegation.¹⁴ According to the letter, Ishihara had stated, “Only immersed Baptists can be accepted as members.”¹⁵ Ishihara’s requirement, although within Baptist doctrine, excluded returning evacuees from other Christian churches. The women who wrote the letter (some from Methodist and other backgrounds) felt slighted by Ishihara’s restrictions and noted, “There is but one Japanese Christian church in the Gardena Valley.”¹⁶

In 1951, friction within the congregation and the need for oversight led to the formation of the first post-war church board, which included twelve people. The board had three from the Issei ministry, three leaders from the “Young Marrieds,” three Sunday school teachers, and three who ministered in the BYF.¹⁷

Pastor Nishimoto managed relationships well and skillfully diffused conflicts. The earlier referenced letter of complaint states: “[Nishimoto] has encouraged our participation in the church and more or less held us together when we were ready to break away.”¹⁸ In a December 8, 1951, letter to Dr. Mayberry, Nishimoto mentioned a near church split.¹⁹ He cited the immediate need for a Nisei pastor.²⁰ Pastor Ishihara served more as a Young People’s minister. Hence, in 1954, Pastor Eishi Hirose joined GVBC as the first official Nisei Pastor.

In 1952, the GVBC board voted to decide the issue of seniority between Pastor Nishimoto and Pastor Ishihara. Pastor Nishimoto gained more votes, and Pastor Ishihara willingly accepted the position of Associate Pastor.²¹ The board set the annual budget of the church at \$6,981 (with Harold Kobata as Treasurer) and adopted a constitution. These structural changes laid a strong foundation upon which to grow the church.

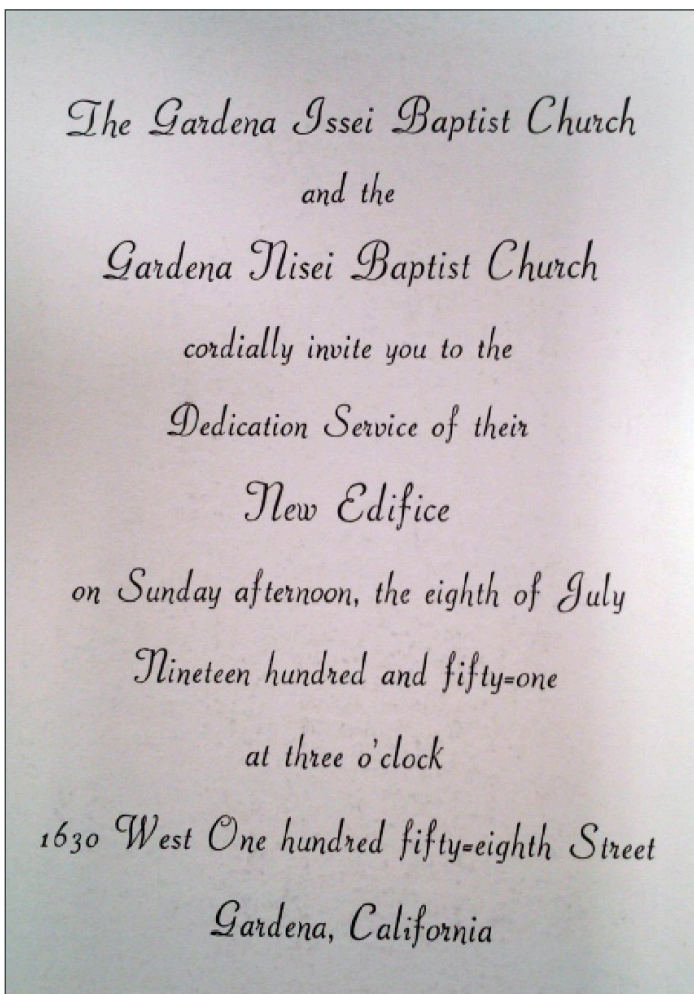
In a February 24, 1954, letter to Dr. Mayberry, Pastor Ishihara resigned from his position at GVBC. Ishihara made no mention of trouble or conflict within the church but wrote that he felt called to a work of ministry in the Sacramento Valley.²² His spiritual gifts motivated him to start new works of

ministry, which was what GVBC needed following the war.

Harold and Reiko Kobata and their families counted Pastors Ishihara and Nishimoto as close personal friends. Harold describes Pastor Ishihara as a “down-to-earth” sort of person, and Pastor Nishimoto as “an everyday person,” and “a person that you felt comfortable with.”²³ Pastor Nishimoto and Reiko Kobata’s (Hagio) father would relax and listen to Dodger games on the radio together and sometimes visit Dodger Stadium. Reiko’s father carried a small transistor radio in his shirt pocket so that he would not miss a minute of the Dodger broadcast. At one church gathering, just as Rev. Nishimoto was ready to give grace, it got quiet. Just then, the radio blared out!²⁴

New Property in Gardena

With the loss of the Dalton Avenue property, GVBC needed a new home, and in 1948 LABCMS purchased lots at the corner of 158th Street and



Dedication Announcement 1951



Dr. Ralph Mayberry and 1950 Groundbreaking Ceremony

Denker Avenue—the present campus—for the sum of \$5,239. The church also purchased adjacent lots from Mary Beardley and from Joe and Sadie Girdner in 1951.

Bruce and Francis Kaji urged the congregation to buy the lots adjacent to the present sanctuary on the corner of 158th Street and Denker Avenue.²⁵ The Kajis felt that GVBC could more easily expand if its property was contiguous, and they urged church families to donate money toward this cause. However, some would not take the risk, being penniless after the war. The Girdners offered the corner lot to the church, but internal discussion about moving the church elsewhere prevented making this purchase before the lot sold.²⁶ Today, the church owns lots with housing across the street on 158th Street and La Salle Avenue, but it does not have room to expand on the present campus. GVBC overcame the challenges to expansion and, on November 15, 1950, held a groundbreaking service. The new church building was dedicated on July 8, 1951. The dedication program included the hymns “The

Church’s One Foundation” and “When I Survey the Wondrous Cross.”

The 1955 meeting minutes of the LABCMS Advisory Council state that GVBC’s total membership was 85, with 45 Issei and 40 Nisei. GVBC’s total Sunday school enrollment included 285 youth (up to twelfth grade) and a Nisei adult Sunday school class of nine people. Many parents, some Buddhist and some too busy with work, dropped their children off for Sunday school but did not attend services themselves. GVBC also held a Monday evening citizenship class taught by Pastor Nishimoto and sponsored by the Japanese Chamber of Commerce. Roughly 100 people attended each three-month class.

Interracial Marriage in the 1950s

During the 1950s, the United States Army frowned upon interracial marriage for its soldiers, especially if it involved persons of Japanese descent. Larry Sanders shared his own experiences both in an interview and in his personal writings.²⁷ The Army nearly prevented him and his fiancé Mieko from

marrying. In 1957, they met at a dance and fell in love while Larry was stationed in Tokyo. After proposing to Mieko, Larry filled out the paperwork required by the Army to marry her. All of the paperwork became lost or was followed by yet more paperwork. The Army sent Larry back to the U.S. in late 1957 with his wedding plans in limbo. Determined to marry Mieko, Larry left the Army in 1959 and worked to save his money and claim his bride. Larry and Mieko exchanged love letters during this difficult, two-year separation. They finally married at the U.S. Embassy in Tokyo in 1959 and settled in Oregon before moving to Gardena and joining GVBC. The Sanders family enjoyed many wonderful years together until cancer claimed Mieko in 1991. More of Larry and Mieko's story can be read in the August 2009 GVBC *Spirit* newsletter.

The Japanese Evangelical Missions Society (JEMS)

Many significant areas of growth occurred in the life of GVBC during the 1950s. This decade also saw the rise of the Japanese Evangelical Missionary Society (JEMS) in 1950, an organization with close ties to GVBC. JEMS was born out of prayer meetings at the Mount Hermon Christian Conference Center near Santa Cruz, California. JEMS arose to rebuild Japanese churches in the United States following the war and to challenge the Nisei with an urgent call for missions to Japan and other countries with large Japanese populations, such as Brazil.

JEMS currently hosts Christian camps at Mount Hermon, engages in music ministry, reaches young people on the margins of society, such as the drug culture of 1960s America, and sponsors prayer breakfasts. It is well known for the Asian American Christian Fellowship (AACF) on college campuses from San Diego to Seattle.

The 1985 book entitled *Vision and Faith* includes a challenge to churches from Dr. James Atherton: "You will never see spiritual development with your congregations until you challenge them with the sense of responsibility for foreign missions."²⁸ This anecdotal history of JEMS contains pictures of current and former GVBC members, including Dr. Paul

Nagano, the first Executive Secretary of JEMS; Pastor Ron Matsuda (and his musical group "Four Gits"); Richard and Keiko Imatomi; and others.

Nagano took the helm of JEMS in 1951 and, during this same year, the *JEMS Journal* began. JEMS sent Dr. Toyotome as its first missionary to Japan in 1953. Pastor and Mrs. Herbert Nicholson, previously mentioned in Chapter Three as instrumental during the war years, would also serve as JEMS missionaries to Japan.

Vision and Faith underscores the fact that JEMS supports rather than competes with Japanese American churches. The lines between the ministry of JEMS and individual American Baptist Churches become blurred at times because both send missionaries to Japan. Leaders of GVBC also led JEMS, including Dr. Nagano, a former GVBC minister; Pastor Sam Tonomura, GVBC pastor and later JEMS Director; and GVBC Pastor Ishihara who later joined the JEMS Board. GVBC presently supports JEMS missionaries financially as well.

Pastor Hirose's Exhaustion

Pastors Harumi Nishimoto and Eishi Hirose served GVBC longer than any previous minister. The life of a pastor can be taxing, however, and two years after arriving, in 1956, Hirose became exhausted and tendered his resignation.²⁹ In a letter to Dr. Alger Geary, then executive secretary of LABCMS, Hirose described his own condition as "nervous exhaustion."³⁰ Geary wrote a cordial return note to Hirose, accepting his resignation but leaving the door open for him to return.³¹ Harold Kobata, moderator of the church board, sought the help of LABCMS in finding a replacement for Hirose—a fact that was recorded on a phone message memo.³²

Little explanation accompanied Hirose's letter. This incident occurred so long ago the Kobatas do not remember the details. The October 12, 1956, *Our Church News* confirms that the nineteen board members met on October 4 to read and accept Pastor Hirose's resignation letter, and Paul Kuida chaired a five-member pulpit committee to seek his replacement. Secretary Geary would later welcome Hirose back as Nisei pastor in a letter dated January



Pastor Eishi Hirose

14, 1957.³³ Hirose withdrew briefly from ministry to recover his strength, shortly returned to fruitful ministry, and became the longest serving minister at GVBC to date. Pastor Hirose served the church joyfully and selflessly, and he is remembered by those closest to him as a man of deep prayer and generous spirit.

Changes at Los Angeles Baptist City Missions Society

The year 1956 proved to be a watershed for LABCMS, marked first by the death of GVBC's symbolic father, Dr. James B. Fox.³⁴ Dr. Ralph Mayberry presided at Fox's funeral.³⁵ Mayberry succeeded Fox as executive minister in 1937, having been ordained in 1912 in Philadelphia. Mayberry retired in 1956 after planting some 45 churches, mostly among ethnic groups in the Los Angeles area.³⁶ Highlights of Dr. Mayberry's legacy include helping GVBC to reunite, obtain property, and rebuild the church campus. Dr. Alger Geary succeeded Mayberry as executive minister of LABCMS. Geary surren-

dered his post in 1966 with roughly 100 American Baptist Churches in the greater Los Angeles area and about 50,000 total members.³⁷

A Burgeoning Sunday School Ministry

By 1957, demand for GVBC's Sunday school ministry strained the available facilities. LABCMS meeting minutes from August 29, 1957, estimated 500 children per Sunday.³⁸ Relocation by the Japanese business community from downtown Los Angeles to Gardena and new freeway access to the "Freeway City" brought many young families to the church. Bill Summers joined the staff as director of Christian education in April 1959, having been a Sunday school teacher for many years at GVBC. Summers founded the Apostles' Car Club for young men in high school while on staff. Howard Imatomi remembers Bill as a great leader and a great guy.³⁹ Howard and a group from GVBC paid respects at Bill's funeral in Riverside in 1988.

The Christian Education Building

GVBC dedicated the new Christian Education (C.E.) Hall on June 3, 1956. Financial records show that the church raised over \$21,000 to complete the C.E. Hall.⁴⁰ At the

dedication service Dr. Mayberry delivered a sermon, and new LABCMS Executive Secretary Dr. Alger Geary attended with Pastors Nishimoto and Hirose. The program included special music from the young people's group and the hymns "The Church's One Foundation" and "All Hail the Power of Jesus Name."⁴¹ This building stood for almost fifty years until it was demolished to make way for the new Community Hall, completed in early 2007.



GVBC Christian Education Hall

CHAPTER FOUR

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38. "Gardena Valley Japanese Church," August 29, 1957.
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CHAPTER FIVE
GVBC During the 1960s:
A Church on the Move





American Baptist Women Doll Festival 1962

GVBC DURING THE 1960s: A CHURCH ON THE MOVE

Despite the turbulence the 1960s in America with the Vietnam War raging and the Hippie movement on college campuses, GVBC made great strides. The energy fairly brimmed over with an active chapter of the American Baptist Women at GVBC and the desire of some to plant another congregation. GVBC raised up remarkable leaders during this decade, some of whom are still active in the church today.

GVBC began as a mission church in 1914 and, by the 1960s, supported missionaries of its own, including Fred Tanaka of Child Evangelism Fellowship in 1963 and a team of young men that went to Hawaii under the leadership of John Momii.

GVBC Sends Missionaries

Fred Tanaka came to GVBC in 1962 from British Columbia, Canada, as a young intern with Child Evangelism Fellowship.¹ Good friends of Pastor Sam Tonomura, who came to GVBC the same year, Fred and his family knew Pastor Nishimoto's family

in Canada. Interestingly, Fred heard Pastor Hirose speak at the Kootenai Japanese Nisei Camp in Canada around 1958.²

Fred joined the robust children's ministry of GVBC when Sunday school meetings overflowed the classrooms and sometimes met outside. Japanese families in the South Bay tended to have large families. Many of the parents who dropped children off for Sunday school were not believers. Fred worked to start "Good News Clubs" that met in homes during the week to reach children and families for Christ. George Nakayama, beloved in the church and a good friend of Fred, hosted a Good News Club in his home with his wife, Marjorie. Sadly, George passed away during the writing of this history.

Fred met Jane, the woman who would become his wife, when they crossed paths in Seattle in preparation for overseas ministry. The forty-minute interview that Fred gave in 2014 in English wore him out because he has spoken Japanese almost exclusively for many years. Fred's romance with Jane

developed over time while they ministered separately, and sometimes they crossed paths. A friendship blossomed into a romance, but Fred shies away from giving too many details. The Tanakas shared a testimony of their work in the May 25, 2014, Sunday services, and GVBC rejoiced with them that they have ministered in Japan for fifty years.

One of GVBC's first short-term missionary teams traveled to Hawaii under the leadership of John Momii. Six young men joined John and ministered at both a boys' correctional facility and a prison, singing and giving testimonies.³

Fifty Years of Ministry to Japanese Americans

On June 12, 1964, Japanese Baptists in Southern California held a 50th Anniversary Banquet entitled Hitherto – Henceforth at the 10th Avenue Baptist Church in Los Angeles. GVBC topped the list of Southern California churches planted among Japanese: “The first Baptist work among the Japanese in Southern California was in 1914 at the ‘Moneta mission’..Thus began fifty years of ministry among the Japanese by the Baptists in Southern California.”⁴ Dr. Paul Nagano presided and Dr. Jitsuo Morikawa delivered the anniversary sermon. GVBC's pastors and Dr. Alger Geary of LABCMS attended, and Molly

Nishimoto accompanied the evening's soloist on piano. Reverend Sam Tonomura, a recent addition to GVBC's staff, also attended.⁵

A Prestige Japanese Church

During the lifespan of the church, the relationship between GVBC and LABCMS has changed greatly. LABCMS (now ABCLA) still maintains a strong bond with GVBC, but GVBC no longer depends on the denomination as a child depends on a parent. The church gained a measure of independence from the society when it bought the present property from LABCMS in 1964. Even with GVBC's growing independence, LABCMS provided much wise counsel at key points in the life of the church.

The course of GVBC's history has hinged on decisions such as whether to remain and improve the present property or to plant a second congregation among Los Angeles-area Japanese. Reverend Sam Tonomura's name is mentioned in two LABCMS memos as a proponent for establishing a second Japanese congregation to reach Japanese families settling in cities south of Gardena.⁶ One of the memos, likely written by LABCMS Secretary Arnold Boals, advised Pastor Hirose to “build a fine structure.” The memo went on to say, “We need a



Church Picnic

prestige Japanese Church, and this (GVBC) could well become that.”⁷ The writer also commented that the neighborhood around Evergreen Baptist Church was in decline with movement away from the inner city.⁸ Gardena represented the focal point of American Baptist ministry to Japanese Americans in Los Angeles County.

Families of Faith

With the wise counsel of LABCMS, GVBC set about raising additional funds to improve the campus in 1967. That same year, Harold Kobata would buy a brand new Ford Mustang for \$2500, and single-family houses in Gardena sold for about \$15,000.⁹ Harold’s wife, Reiko, had never contemplated a figure as high as \$170,000: the amount GVBC borrowed from the Bank of Tokyo in December of 1969. The Kobatas saw the need for new facilities, believed in the work of GVBC, and had faith that the Lord would provide. Other families joined them in guaranteeing the loan by putting up the deeds on their homes, including Raymond and Setsuko Fujimoto, Paul and May Koga, Ryo and Jean Komae, Kameichi and Fumi Kuida, Paul and Chizuko Kuida, Sam and May Minami, Joe and Jean Miyoshi, Donald and Claudine Stratton, and Tak and Jeannette Tsutsui.

The groundbreaking ceremony took place on October 19, 1969. Great faith would be required to raise the funds necessary to build the present sanctuary—some \$350,000. This challenge came to a congregation still smarting from their evacuation and, for many, the loss of their worldly wealth. This tension, in addition to the American tendency to “keep up with the Joneses,” hindered the fund-raising efforts, as Frances Kaji recalls.¹⁰

1960s Youth Ministry

A vibrant Sunday school ministry continued through the 1960s, under the direction of Helene Shimane. The leaders that went before her set a high standard for children’s ministry, and Helene believes that her training as a teacher equipped her to direct this ministry.¹¹ In 1960, 551 students attended Sunday school during the two worship services, and by 1967, the average Sunday school attendance

reached 603.¹²

Cyril Nishimoto recalls Helene as his first Sunday school teacher. The church used creative names for the different age groups, such as the Jet Cadets and Jr. Gems. Cyril desperately wanted to join the Jet Cadets but was too young. The Jet Cadets imagined themselves part of God’s air force and sang a special theme song at meetings: “We’re Jet Cadets for Jesus big and small! Living for our Savior one and all! Jesus is our pilot, never once forgets, all who are enlisted in the Jet Cadets!”¹³

Suzanne Hasegawa initially came to the church around 1967 so that she and her daughter could participate in the YMCA Indian Princess group.¹⁴ This program involved worship and prayer, mother and daughter crafts, and mingling with others from Gardena and Torrance. From this introduction, Suzanne grew to become a leader in the children’s ministry and a friend to Helene. Pastor Hirose would later baptize Suzanne’s children, and she remains a part of GVBC today.¹⁵ The young boys at GVBC met in a group called the Indian Guides, a counterpart to the Indian Princesses. They played games and sports and learned about Native American culture.¹⁶

Raising up Christian Leaders

During the 1960s, Christian leaders arose from the ranks of the youth and young adults at GVBC. Hazel Endo recalls a dynamic and spiritual group of young people that included Ron Matsuda, Richard and Howard Imatomi, and Shig Kawashiri, to name a few that still attend GVBC.¹⁷ On the weekends, student leaders would come to GVBC from Biola University to attend Sunday services. During the day, they stayed in Gardena to play basketball and enjoy themselves, eating and showering at Hazel’s home, and attending the evening college group meeting.¹⁸ GVBC college students also visited other churches for “Nisei Sing,” sometimes leading the worship service. Hazel felt that God revealed to her GVBC’s next generation of leaders, and she wanted to support them as much as she could.¹⁹

Ryo and Jean Komae feel pride that GVBC raised up leaders who would serve outside of the church,



Christmas Program

including pastors Gary Tawa (Cerritos Baptist Church) and Shin Asami (Anaheim Free Methodist Church). When asked how GVBC raised up so many leaders, Ryo deflects the praise, saying that these leaders answered God's call to expand His church beyond the borders of Gardena.²⁰ GVBC's sixtieth anniversary program stated it similarly: "For the past 60 years the Issei and Nisei have responded to the call of the Master. In the coming years the Sansei and Yonsei will hear the same call."



Rev. Sam Tonomura and Rev. Harumi Nishimoto

The GVBC Body Ministers

On April 4, 1969, the Reverend Sam and June Tonomura lived every parent's nightmare, losing their four-year-old daughter Carolyn to Leukemia. Time does not heal all wounds, as the pain of their loss still shows on their faces in 2014. Sam can only shrug, admitting that he will never understand this tragedy until he is in heaven. Redemption did come from this tragedy, however. GVBC ministered comfort during this awful time of grief. The Tonomuras felt loved, understood, and cared for by the church.²¹

God further redeemed the loss of Carolyn in the lives of the Tonomuras. Their five-year-old daughter Pamela could not understand at the time why the doctors could not fix Carolyn. She would not accept plagues that attack the human body and vowed at her early age to become a doctor. June grudgingly affirmed Pamela's desire, realizing that it would mean a life of constant sacrifice. Pamela fulfilled her vow and graduated from medical school at the University of Southern California.²² God further used the Tonomura's pain by helping them identify more deeply with those suffering around them.²³

The decade of the 1960s at GVBC, though not without difficulty and loss, proved spiritually sweet and fruitful. The congregation took risks to further the ministry of the church. Leaders and even pastors arose as the Spirit moved, with the steady hand of Pastor Eishi Hirose guiding the ship. The church came of age and began to reach beyond its own walls, to the community and even to the world.

CHAPTER FIVE

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CHAPTER SIX
The 1970s and 1980s:
Decades of Challenge





Church and Pacific Square

THE 1970S AND 1980S: DECADES OF CHALLENGE

Whereas the 1960s saw the rise of many leaders and much fruitful ministry at GVBC, the 1970s and 80s proved difficult decades. The annual reports published by GVBC from around 1967 portrayed an organized church with a pastoral greeting and a report from each administrative unit. These reports omitted the struggles taking place behind the scenes over doctrine and leadership. Some of these divisions extended well into the 1990s.

The Vietnam War also raged during the 1970s and claimed the life of Gardena native, First Lieutenant Glen Hata, on April 2, 1971.¹ GVBC Seaman Dan Minami wrote home on November 26, 1972, thanking the American Baptist Women for the care package they sent to him.² He acknowledged the difficulty of living out his faith aboard ship due to ridicule, persecution, and temptation. He and his comrades fought ferocious battles in the Vietnam Theater, and he asked for continued prayers for protection.³ A young Steve Langley, future Senior Pastor, trained with the U.S.

Navy in San Diego and later deployed to the Mekong Delta of Vietnam where he served as a Combat Photographer.

During this decade, American Christians talked about End-Time events, spurred by books such as Hal Lindsay's 1970 *The Late Great Planet Earth*. GVBC moved with these currents, and a 1977 church function included the piano music of Phebe Nishimoto, Pastor Harumi and Molly's daughter and the showing of the film, *The Road to Armageddon* on the same evening.⁴

In perhaps the most visible and exciting event of these decades, in 1971, GVBC dedicated a new sanctuary, the present one. Pastor Sam Tonomura, a new GVBC staff member, led the building project. Although a building does not make the church, Pastor Tonomura remembers it as a catalyst for growth, with many new families visiting and joining soon after.

Pastor Earl Kuester of Gardena Calvary Baptist Church (now Crossroads Christian Center), the chair of the Ordination Committee for ABCLA, called



1971 Sanctuary Dedication

for the examination of two candidates from GVBC. The American Baptist denomination ordained Ron Matsuda and Sam Tonomura on the same day in 1972.⁵ In the same year, Pastor Matsuda and his family joined Overseas Crusades as missionaries in Indonesia, faithfully supported by GVBC.

Charismatic Gifts and Controversy

The January 11, 1976, *Los Angeles Times* featured an article entitled “Miracles an Everyday Event to the Pentecostals.”⁶ The so-called “charismatic renewal” swept through the churches, and GVBC felt the shock waves, which caused division and almost split the church. The charismatic controversy actually arose at GVBC as early as 1970. Pastor Hirose and his wife Denko believed in practicing gifts of Holy Spirit, including speaking in tongues, prophesying, and praying for miraculous physical healing. They apparently attended seminars aligned with the teaching of Kathryn Kuhlman, a traditional Pentecostal spokeswoman.⁷

Gardena Calvary Baptist Church, just under a mile away from GVBC, experienced a similar and even stronger renewal, occasionally hosting well-known

charismatic speakers. Senior Pastor Earl Kuester tried to embrace the movement of the Holy Spirit being witnessed across the country and the world, and some divisions arose at that church as well.⁸ Pastor Hirose and Pastor Kuester likely compared notes on these subjects, though no official record survives.

On one occasion, the Hiroses conducted a healing service and demonstrated practicing the gifts, which shocked those who did not embrace this new direction.⁹ A group of people in the church signed a petition against further charismatic involvement at GVBC.¹⁰ Some in church leadership sought a denominational intervention, but LABCMS had no official position on the gifts of the Holy Spirit. So, it was up to the GVBC to come to some resolution.¹¹

Some church leaders strove to keep the church together and believed that there could be theological differences in the congregation without dividing the church.¹² Those practicing the gifts became quite strident, however, making the gifts an article of faith. Those opposed felt this reflected immaturity, and it led those who were strong in their faith to overlook the less mature.¹³ Over time the controversy dimin-

ished but not before some left the church.

Dr. Ken Hiroshige, who also believed in practicing the gifts of the Spirit, had a following within the church. The Sunday school class he taught explored the gifts.¹⁴ Some recall that Pastor Hirose did not teach about the gifts from the pulpit, but tried to lead the congregation toward practicing the gifts.¹⁵

Marianne Matsuda believed the gifts of the Holy Spirit belonged at GVBC. She grew up in Hawaii and witnessed the practice of native religion, which gave her a unique insight in to the nature of spiritual warfare. She felt that the ministry of GVBC would be effective only under the guidance, and with the empowerment, of the Holy Spirit. She did not find herself at odds with those that did not embrace the gifts.¹⁶

Pastor David Shinoda joined GVBC in 1987. He considered himself theologically American Baptist, but this did not preclude being Pentecostal, and he was drawn partly by the charismatic awakening.¹⁷ By the time Pastor Shinoda arrived, Pastor Hirose had retired and Pastor Ron Matsuda inherited the acrimony. Pastor Matsuda took a neutral stance

toward the practice of the gifts, which Pastor Shinoda respected. Shinoda wanted to explore the expression of the gifts but did not want to see the church divide.¹⁸ GVBC members did not openly discuss the conflict, but Pastor Shinoda could feel an underlying divisiveness during his ministry.¹⁹

In addition to the traditional Pentecostal approach to the ministry of the Holy Spirit, the “Jesus People” movement also claimed credit in the Charismatic Renewal of the 1970s—young people converted to Christianity from the 1960s “Hippie Movement.” The youth fellowships at GVBC, Teen Christian Fellowship (TCF) and Young Teen Fellowship (YTF) followed along the lines of the “Jesus People” movement.²⁰

Shin Asami and Jim Cumbie served the youth at GVBC and embraced the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Much energy flowed from the YTF group from 1972, when it was reestablished at GVBC. Dozens of concerts, films, and camps took place, including the music group Mustard Seed Faith and the film *A Thief in the Night*. Longtime GVBC member Kent Thiry kept a record of events and recorded Jim Cumbie as



1971 Sanctuary

saying in 1974, "...By the leading of the Holy Spirit through the sponsors, Shin Asami and Jim Cumbie, there has [sic] been many victories. But the greatest victories were the many souls that have come to know Jesus Christ as their personal Lord and Savior."

The charismatic renewal sorely tested the unity of GVBC. Given the close bonds in the Los Angeles Japanese Christian community, word of this division spread far beyond the walls of the church. The subject of spiritual gifts alone did not divide the church but also the power struggle surrounding the issue.

Many in the church today would only have a vague knowledge of the division, but some at GVBC believe that it still casts a shadow upon the unity of the church and that there are invisible lines drawn over which one should not step. Pastor Steve acknowledges that the twenty-year conflict, which split the church in 1995, is a part of GVBC's identity today.

The Ministry of the Holy Spirit at GVBC

Though some in the church vehemently opposed the formalized practice of the gifts of the Holy Spirit, there are anecdotal accounts of Spirit-led miracles visiting the congregation. Alice and Perry Miyake experienced such a miracle in 1983 and told the story as follows: Ron Miyake, Alice and Perry's son, had urged his father to accept Jesus for many years. Perry resisted saying that he was not ready. Because Perry worked long hours during the week, he reserved Sundays for golf rather than church. On one such Sunday, Alice attended services and sat near the front of a full sanctuary by the communion table. During the service, Alice felt the presence of the Holy Spirit and wept tears of joy without knowing why.

At the same moment, as Perry drove the freeway from Fountain Valley following his golf game, he felt what he described as a jolt of electricity coursing through his whole body. He knew God had touched him so he went to GVBC to find Alice and tell her he was ready to receive Jesus. Ron felt joy and relief. He no longer worried about his father's spiritual destiny. Ron went on to attend seminary and to serve as a missionary to Japan for a decade. He now pastors at



Responding to Pastor Hirose's installation challenge are Mesdames Aiko Hiroshige (Nichigobu), Agnes Munesato (Dorcas), Judy Dohi (Eriscilla), Marianne Matsuda (ABW Pres.), Geri Oda (ABW Sec.), Alice Kimura (ABW Treas.), Kate Murata (ABW VP), Marilyn Sunahara (ABW Hist.), Nami Fukuzawa (Esther).

Evergreen Baptist Church, San Gabriel Valley.²¹

Pastor Ron Matsuda felt some pressure to manifest the gifts of the Holy Spirit during these years of Charismatic renewal at GVBC.²² He prayed fervently for God to give him every gift intended for him, and he opened himself to the work of God. He did not ever experience a "filling" and never spoke in tongues. He came to the conviction that he only needed to abide in Christ to receive the ministry of the Holy Spirit in whatever form it took. God impressed upon him the verses in John Chapter 15 about abiding in Christ. These would become theme verses later in his life.²³

In the 1991 GVBC *Spirit* newsletter, Manny Nakamura, long time GVBC member, gave testimony of the Lord's healing from skin rashes. The healing did not come instantly, but involved visiting numerous specialists and receiving diagnoses ranging from poison ivy to second-degree burns. She wrote, "Through repeated and persistent prayers of His people in the Evangelism group of our church, God

delivered me completely from eleven years of bondage to this terrible skin disorder.”²⁴

Demographic Snapshot of GVBC in 1988

As of 1988, according to the LABCMS Congregational Profile, GVBC remained predominantly a Japanese American church though mostly English-speaking. Eighty percent of attendees lived within one mile of the church, and married couples accounted for more than half of the congregation. Twenty five percent of the congregation identified themselves as professionals. The Nisei generation—inside and outside of GVBC—excelled educationally and professionally following the evacuation and the events of World War II.

The Japanese Language (Nichigo) Congregation

The Nichigo included a summary of their ministry in the Annual Reports from the 1960s. Prior to World War II, and during the pastorate of Jitsuo Morikawa, ministry was divided between Japanese and English-speaking services to accommodate the second generation of Japanese known as Nisei. Pastor Morikawa spoke both Japanese and English. The division between Japanese and English congregations became more defined after the church reunited, and the Nichigo has had their own minister and held their own services ever since. In the 1967 annual report, Pastor Nishimoto recorded an average Sunday morning attendance of fifty-five persons. Some in the Japanese community in the Gardena area only stay temporarily as students or business travelers, which likely accounted for the modest size of the group.

In 1980, the 66th year of GVBC, Pastor Nishimoto retired following thirty years of service. Pastor Kunihiko Amano replaced him as Nichigo Pastor, arriving from the Seattle Baptist Church. Pastor Amano remained until 1987.

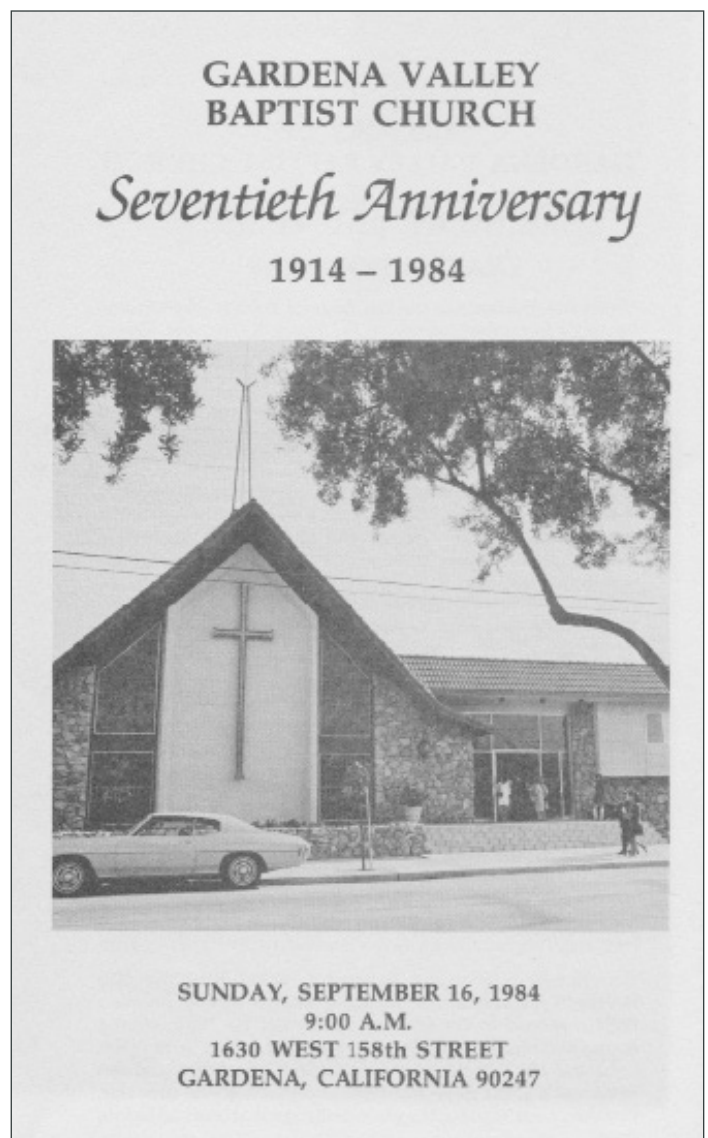
Blessing Arises from Tragedy

Many believers at GVBC have turned tragedy into triumph during the hundred-year lifespan of the church. Beloved member Jean Miyoshi lost her husband of thirty-nine years when gang *members shot*

*him at his auto parts business in 1981.*²⁵ *Jean fell into a depression, asking the Lord why he allowed him to be taken. In the midst of this valley, she heard a call to begin a new ministry to widows at GVBC. With the help of Toki Yogi and Miyoko Takushi, Jean launched the Koinonia Singles Ministry. The group soon grew to 40 members and two Bible studies. The Koinonia ministry continues today.*

GVBC's 70th Anniversary

The September 8, 1984, edition of the *Gardena Valley News* reported on the 70th anniversary celebration of GVBC. The church chose “Great Is Thy Faithfulness” as the theme, and Pastor Roy Ishihara returned to GVBC to deliver the sermon. Pastor Hirose explained, “What we are really celebrating is God’s faithfulness to us over the past seventy years of Christian ministry in Gardena and the surrounding



areas. Our church, as any other church, has seen its struggling, difficult times as well as its expanding and successful years, and through it all, God has been faithful in standing by and blessing the ministry of Gardena Valley Baptist Church.”²⁶

Overcoming Additional Challenges

In 1988, GVBC’s congregation faced the specter of a long-time member and strong lay leader in the

church being accused of sexual abuse in his job as a public school teacher. The church believed in his innocence and some 30 GVBC members attended his trial to read Bible verses and pray. Within a few months, a jury acquitted him of all charges, citing a lack of evidence.²⁷ In addition to the suffering of this member, the trial and publicity took a toll on Pastor Matsuda, who faced more than his share of difficulties during his time as senior pastor.²⁸

CHAPTER SIX

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CHAPTER SEVEN
GVBC Comes of Age:
The 1990s to the Present





Pastor Ron Matsuda and Family

GVBC COMES OF AGE: THE 1990S TO THE PRESENT

The decade of the 1990s began on an uneasy note with the resignation of GVBC Senior Pastor Ron Matsuda in August of 1990. In addition to being a personal crisis in Pastor Matsuda's life, this event marked a crisis in the life of the church. Pastors Nishimoto and Hirose both served GVBC for three decades. The membership of GVBC likely expected similar longevity from Pastor Matsuda. It was not to be.

Pastor Ron Matsuda

GVBC members interviewed for this history have mentioned Pastor Ron Matsuda's name repeatedly as one of the most beloved of all ministers. Pastor Matsuda joined the staff of GVBC as Associate Pastor in 1980. He served on staff at GVBC from 1970 to 1972 until he, his wife Anne, and their two children went to Indonesia as missionaries. Pastor Matsuda

served beyond the full extent of his energy. As with Pastor Hirose's short hiatus from ministry to recover his strength during the 1950s, Pastor Matsuda became exhausted and resigned as senior pastor in 1990.

As one gets to know Pastor Matsuda, it is not surprising that he felt, as senior pastor, he was serving outside of his gifts. He acknowledges that he does not excel in administration and supervision of others.¹ His love for systematic teaching of the Bible also does not automatically translate to the running of a large organization.

Pastor Ron Matsuda's Personal History

Growing up on Oahu, Ron's family claimed nominal Buddhism as their faith. After moving to Gardena, he attended an Episcopal Sunday school class in addition to meetings at the Buddhist church.² His mother noticed his devotion to studying a worn

King James Bible, which he borrowed from the church. She suggested he attend GVBC instead of the Buddhist church. He gladly accepted, as he knew other young men from GVBC who were his fellow Boy Scouts.³

Called forth from the laity of GVBC, Ron taught Sunday school. His hunger for God's Word grew, and he joined a guitar group with three other GVBCers. John Momi, a lay leader at GVBC, encouraged his guitar playing, but also engaged the young men in studying the Bible and praying together. This guitar fellowship group lasted five years. As their music progressed, the "Four Gits" would perform at other churches and at the JEMS Mount Hermon camps.⁴

As a senior in high school, Ron and the Four Gits played at one particular JEMS Mount Hermon camp. That weekend proved life changing in more ways than one as Ron met Anne, his future wife, and felt called away from scientific study towards Christian education. He went on to study at the University of Southern California, and he later studied the Bible at Dallas Theological Seminary.⁵

Ordained as an American Baptist minister in 1972, Pastor Matsuda and his family spent nearly a decade on the mission field with Overseas Crusades (now OC International) in Indonesia, teaching the Bible to missionaries serving there. Pastor Matsuda wanted not to be a senior pastor at this time but only to teach the Bible.⁶ God changed Pastor Matsuda's path through a phone call from Richard Imatomi, GVBC board moderator, during the second term of his service in Indonesia. Richard offered him the job of associate pastor at GVBC.⁷ Matsuda accepted the position and flourished in the role. When Hirose retired, the board naturally asked Matsuda to become the senior pastor. As this call seemed logical and proper, he accepted the position in 1986.⁸ He soon discovered how different his new job would be.

The Wilderness of Exhaustion

During his tenure as senior pastor, Ron faced bitter divisions within the congregation over the exercise of charismatic gifts and the molestation charges against a strong lay leader. These crises exhausted Pastor Matsuda as he sought to guide the church.

The American Baptist Churches of Los Angeles (ABCLA) required an annual report from Pastor Matsuda called the Congregational Profile. The report quantified all aspects of the church's ministry: how many outreaches were held, how many members were baptized, how many visitations were conducted, financial proceeds, membership numbers, et cetera. The report resembled government documents as it contained codes to designate the county in which the church is located. While reports provide a useful management tool, such methods were antithetical to Pastor Matsuda's personal approach to ministry. An executive personality would be required of the future leader of GVBC.

Pastor Matsuda became depressed and disillusioned in his ministry, barely able to drag himself in to work to face the many challenges put before him. He describes this period as the most difficult of his life. He sought God during this "dark night of the soul," but God seemed distant.⁹ The stress he felt began to affect his sleep, and he sought counseling from a Christian psychologist. The psychologist told him that he could not go on indefinitely without suffering physical harm.¹⁰ The GVBC board decided to give Pastor Matsuda a six-month leave of absence.

During his leave, he and Anne sought refreshment by spending time in the beauty of the outdoors. During one of their long hikes in Big Bear, they came upon three small oak trees growing out of a rock and sheltering a small sapling growing out of the same rock. Both Pastor Matsuda and Anne strongly agreed that God was speaking to them.¹¹ Regardless of a difficult and uncertain path, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit sheltered Pastor Matsuda (the sapling). He felt that it was time to resign from the pastorate.¹²

Valuable Spiritual Lessons

Pastor Matsuda describes the feelings of failure and shame he felt upon leaving GVBC. He avoided shopping at the Pacific Supermarket, now Marukai, for many years to avoid awkward exchanges with church members.¹³

He worked at UCLA in the Audio Visual Department for about five years. In 1996, he taught for a week at Redwood Christian Camp in Northern



GVBC Pastoral Search Committee
 Front Row: Keiko Imatomi, Hazel Endo, Shig Kawashiri
 Middle Row: Bob Matsushima, George Nakayama, Richard Imatomi, Kent Komae
 Top Row: David Rock, Steve Sasaki

California. This was the first time he had taught in many years and he began haltingly, but he hit his stride by about the third day of the conference. He felt great emotion as he realized God was calling him to teach the Bible again.¹⁴

A little while later, Pastor Steve Langley, who succeeded Pastor Matsuda, met Ron at UCLA for lunch. With the GVBC board's blessing, he invited Ron to rejoin the staff as a part-time teaching pastor. Pastor Matsuda spent six years working part-time at GVBC and part-time at Cerritos Baptist Church. Both churches subsequently offered him full-time positions, and he chose GVBC.

During his Wednesday night Bible classes of the late 1990s, Pastor Matsuda shared the story of his ministry trials, resignation, and ensuing identity crisis. Through his wilderness experience he learned to find his identity in Christ, and he admonished those in his classes to do the same. Pastor Matsuda

and Anne continue to attend GVBC today, as do their son Daniel, associate pastor; Daniel's wife Linda, the former director of Early Childhood Development at GVBC; and Daniel's son Joshua. Pastor Ron retired in 2012 and continues to teach the Bible at GVBC.

The Pastoral Search Committee

Shortly after Pastor Matsuda's resignation, a Pastoral Search Committee (PSC) formed, led by Shig Kawashiri, and comprised of Hazel Endo, Keiko and Richard Imatomi, Kent Komae, Bob Matsushima, George Nakayama, David Rock, and Steve Sasaki. The committee spent three and a half years searching for Pastor Matsuda's replacement. They recommended that an interim pastor act as an executive over the staff and deliver the majority of Sunday sermons. Drs. Paul Kopp (1992) and Ralph Lightbody (1993-94) served in this capacity.

A 1990s American Baptist Document entitled "Organization of the Pastoral Staff" likens the church

to a living organism and warns against sharing the office of senior pastor: “There can be only one chief of staff,” and “A creature with more than one head is a monster.” Prior to the interim pastors, Pastor David Shinoda and Pastor Stan Komae co-pastored the church, sharing preaching and visitation duties. The overblown language of the Baptist memo proved partly true, as tensions among staff members threatened to boil over. The Church Board requested the help of the ABCLA Executive Minister, Dr. Emory Campbell, to stabilize the situation and find a new senior pastor.

Initially in favor of co-pastoring with Pastor Stan Komae, Pastor Shinoda began to lean toward the stabilizing hand of an interim pastor.¹⁵ Pastor Stan Komae and others apparently felt that Komae was next in line to be senior pastor. Komae wrote a blistering memo to the board in response to the PSC’s recommendation to hire Dr. Paul Kopp as an interim senior pastor.¹⁶ Kent Komae, brother of Pastor Stan Komae, found himself in the uncomfortable position of sitting on PSC and recommending hiring an interim minister.

Dr. Paul Kopp came to GVBC with a stellar biography: highly educated, the former pastor of four churches, the former president of the Southern California Baptist Convention, president of the Southern California Baptist Ministers, and a nine-year member of the General Counsel of the American Baptist Convention. No stranger to the role of interim pastor, Dr. Kopp served as an interim in Eugene, Oregon, in 1982. Pastor Shinoda remembers Dr. Kopp as a wonderful mentor and encourager, and Dr. Lightbody mostly for his preaching of Sunday sermons.¹⁷ Dr. Kopp died in January of 2014 during the writing of this history. Richard Imatomi and others from GVBC attended his funeral in Santa Barbara, California.

Pastoral Wish List

In a 1990 brainstorming session, the PSC wrote a lengthy wish list of traits desired in a senior pastor: “Coach, encourager, discipler, shepherd, challenger, trainer, director, motivator, overseer, and general.”¹⁸ The document stressed the need for visionary

leadership at GVBC to reach beyond the walls of the church into the community.

The PSC sought out scores of Asian pastors in the Los Angeles area and even those not from American Baptist Churches. These ministers heard of the divisions at GVBC related to the gifts of the Holy Spirit, and none would jump into the fray. By 1992, during the Interim Pastorate of Dr. Paul Kopp, the PSC circulated a ballot among its members to determine if there was preference for an Asian minister over other ethnicities. The ballots collected by the PSC indicated that the committee should consider a non-Asian candidate.

Pastor Stephen Langley History

Born in Hollywood, California, Pastor Steve Langley moved to Gardena during Labor Day weekend of 1951, where he joined his classmates at Chapman Avenue Elementary.¹⁹ At this time, his family attended Temple Baptist Church in Pershing Square, traveling downtown from Gardena. They would shortly join GVBC’s younger sister church, Calvary Baptist Gardena, in 1952.²⁰

Pastor Steve’s mother served as Calvary’s secretary. His mother’s occupation partly charted his course as a future American Baptist Minister, though he dug in his heels for a few years, delivering newspapers in Gardena and being too tired to attend Sunday services.²¹ Pastor Steve first learned of GVBC when he attended Peary Junior High School and walked past the church on his way to school. He met a few GVBCers at Gardena High School, and his education there would later lend him a measure of credibility as a Caucasian minister serving the Japanese Community.²²

Pastor Steve says, “Not knowing what God wants to do has always been a part of our lives.”²³ Prior to joining GVBC, Pastor Steve and his wife Nancy ministered, to their surprise, at Whittier First Baptist Church, where Nancy grew up and where the Langleys were married.²⁴ During the Langleys’ ministry, the 1987 Whittier Narrows Earthquake heavily damaged their church building, along with much of historic uptown Whittier. This event forced Whittier First Baptist Church to move for a



Rev. Steve Langley and Mrs. Nancy Langley

time while they raised money and renovated their building. They moved into an old J.C. Penny storefront nearby, and Pastor Steve notes that God used the earthquake and renovation as a catalyst for church growth.²⁵ Many people in their church participated in the construction project, which forged a stronger bond between the church and the community. The new facilities allowed for a robust ministry through vacation Bible schools, and many young families became part of the church.²⁶

The Langleys Receive a Call

As Pastor Steve and Nancy recollect these events, prior to their coming to GVBC, God connected them to GVBC Interim Pastor, Dr. Paul Kopp, as Nancy served as his secretary at Temple Baptist Church, and Kopp supervised and mentored Steve for a year in Stockton, California. Dr. Kopp knew of Steve's organizational skills and met with him for lunch to go over GVBC's constitution in 1992. Steve offered a few suggestions, but Kopp did not mention GVBC's need for a senior pastor at this meeting.

The journey toward GVBC began for the Langleys in early 1993 when they met ABCLA Associate Minister Dr. Sam Chetti (later Executive Secretary of ABCLA) for lunch and he approached them about the pastorate at GVBC. Steve told Chetti he had no interest in changing churches. Chetti did not leave it there, however. Later that same year he met Steve and Nancy for lunch again and requested that they meet with the GVBC board of deacons and the Pastoral Search Committee Chairman Shig Kawashiri. Prior to meeting formally with the Langleys, the GVBC Pastoral Search Committee visited Whittier First Baptist Church to hear Steve speak. The committee "stood out like a sore thumb" because they were all Japanese in a predominantly Caucasian church, except for David Rock, a Caucasian who stood a foot taller than the rest of the committee.²⁷ The committee witnessed a unity at Whittier First Baptist that they wanted to see duplicated at GVBC, and they believed that Steve could provide this guidance.

The Langleys then agreed to meet with Shig Kawashiri and Board Moderator Richard Imatomi at GVBC for a walk-through and lunch at the Carrows restaurant in Pacific Square. Though Whittier First Baptist had Japanese American members, Steve was not well acquainted with Japanese American culture. He could tell right away, however, that there were deep divisions at GVBC. Following the meeting, Shig and Richard escorted the Langleys to their car parked a block from GVBC because someone had recently been shot near the church. The Langleys felt uneasiness on several levels during this encounter. They told Richard and Shig, "We'll let you know," but as soon as they were on their way home, they looked at each other and Nancy said, "We're never coming back to this church!"²⁸

About a year later, Dr. Chetti offered Steve the position outright. Steve turned him down flat, saying that he had just gotten Whittier First Baptist Church back in to their building, and they were starting to see the fruit of their ministry efforts. At this time, Chetti who had ministered as a youth pastor and knew Dr. Kopp also approached Steve and asked him to consider the position at GVBC. Steve did not want to meet with Chetti, as he had no sense that

the Lord was leading him to GVBC. Out of respect for his influence in their lives, Steve and Nancy also considered the counsel of Dr. Kopp during this period. Chetti suggested God's guidance during their third meeting to discuss the GVBC pastorate. Pastor Steve believes that when something occurs three times over a short period, God may be trying to get his attention. He agreed with Chetti that a third meeting was significant, and he and Nancy began to pray intentionally for God's guidance in such a big decision.

The PSC continued to pursue Steve, as they arranged approximately ten meetings with him in 1993. Following a potluck at GVBC, Steve participated in a question and answer session. He offered intentionally blunt answers because he was still trying to disqualify himself from becoming the pastor. He also delivered a sermon at GVBC about the subject of service. Steve believes that service is inseparable from living a Christian life. He searched the Bible for passages related to service and found ten pages worth of references, which he printed on the church's dot matrix printer.

After these events, in the winter of 1993, the PSC recommended calling the Langleys, and the GVBC board of deacons agreed. The vote was not unanimous among the PSC, and the Langleys decided, given the divisions existing at the church, that they would need a ninety percent approval from the GVBC Congregation to indicate a clear mandate to lead the church. When he stated these terms to ABCLA Executive Secretary Dr. Emory Campbell, Campbell blew up over the phone. He shouted in protest that Steve had altered the rules of the game. Campbell stated that Steve would never get that level of approval. Shortly thereafter, Shig Kawashiri called Steve to let him know that he had received a miraculous ninety-two percent approval from the GVBC Congregation! Even then, Steve did not swiftly accept the call. He cut short poor Shig's celebration by saying that he would give the committee an answer the following day.

As Steve and Nancy considered the offer at home that evening, Nancy said that they really needed someone with God's wisdom to guide their decision.

Not ten seconds later, the telephone rang. Dr. Paul Kopp called to say, "You're going, aren't you?"²⁹ Dr. Kopp felt that the Lord had been making his will known for some time, but the Langleys had been reluctant to answer the call. Steve called Shig the following day to let him know that they would accept. GVBC had finally found their man!

Looking back, Pastor Steve recognizes that his coming to GVBC was of the Holy Spirit. He never desired to come, yet the call to serve as senior pastor was one of the strongest spiritual leadings in all of his life. The Langleys officially joined GVBC on March 16, 1994, just two weeks after Pastor Harumi Nishimoto's death. Steve attended the funeral as one of his first community appearances as GVBC's Pastor-elect.

Early Stages of Ministry

Looking back on Pastor Steve's twenty years of ministry at GVBC, it becomes clear that his skills met the needs of the church. He took a year to pray and observe GVBC before undertaking major initiatives. He does not consider himself good at conflict resolution but was nonetheless thrust into this area of ministry.³⁰ He experienced extreme negativity from a staff member or two at GVBC, and the resulting stress manifest itself in the form of painful skin rashes.³¹ Thankfully, this trial did not last long.

Pastor Steve came to understand that historically the ethnic makeup of GVBC, rather than doctrinal agreement, held the body together. Following the controversy of charismatic gifts the church fractured into fiefdoms led by strong personalities. These disagreements festered, but the church held together nonetheless. GVBC needed a theological center and common purpose.

Unity among the staff was Pastor Steve's first priority, and the staff functioned more cohesively than the congregation. Pastor Steve recalls Pastor Komae giving him much practical advice as to how to minister among Japanese Americans. Pastor Komae also had a strong ministry of prayer. Pastors David Shinoda and Stan Komae enjoyed a cordial relationship, which became strained in the vacuum of leadership prior to Pastor Steve's arrival. Pastor



MOCHITSUKI

Once again, the 55+ will be sponsoring a mochi making demonstration in the CE Hall. Everyone is invited to participate and learn about one of the Japanese New Years' traditions. The schedule will be:

Event: **Rice Washing**
 Date: Friday, December 15th
 Time: 7:00 PM

Event: **Mochi Making**
 Date: Saturday, December 16th
 Time: 7:00 AM

Sign up on the Information Table if you would like to come and help out or purchase mochi. First priority will be given to those who participate in washing the mochigome and in preparing the mochi. Please bring your own boxes to take the mochi home. †

Komae's supporters wanted him to start his own church, and they desired that GVBC send him out with their blessing. Pastor Steve did not oppose this idea, but the board of deacons voted against it. This led to a split in the church. About forty members went with Pastor Stan to his new church in Torrance, and another sixty left as a consequence of the changes taking place—not uncommon with the arrival of a new pastor. Pastor Steve admits that it is nearly impossible not to take the loss of 100 members personally.³²

Associate Pastor David Shinoda felt he should leave the GVBC staff and give Pastor Langley and himself a fresh start.³³ Shinoda believed that God would open another door for him within six months of Pastor Langley's arrival. In March of 1995, he joined the staff of the Church of the Foothills in San Jose, California.³⁴

Pastor Steve immediately recognized the need to build future leaders at GVBC and beyond. To this end, he began a pastoral intern program.³⁵ Warren Nozaki served as the first pastoral intern at GVBC. Harry Tom, Ed Oxford, Pastor Daniel Matsuda,

Pastor Thien Doan, and Pastor Tom Demorest also served as interns.

During the years of division at GVBC, Vacation Bible School (VBS) had been lost. Nancy Langley had been the Children's Director at Whittier First Baptist Church, and served alongside of her husband at GVBC as a lay leader. With the help of Kari Maeda, Nancy Terasaki, Jody Komae, and others, the VBS program was revived. The church facilities did not rival what GVBC has today—they toiled in the summer heat without air conditioning, but they also had a lot of fun.³⁶ Pastor K.C. Jones and his wife Debbie took over the running of VBS in their role as Children's Ministers once it was up and running again.

Recognized by all as a gifted administrator, Pastor Langley calculates numbers in his head during budget



31

**PRIME-TIMERS
 INSTALLATION LUNCHEON
 KANDA SUSHI BUFFET**

**23305 Hawthorne Boulevard, Torrance
 February 11, 1996 at 1:00 - 3:30 PM
 \$12.50 per person including tax & tip**

DONATIONS FOR DOOR PRIZES REQUESTED



discussions and is surprised when others do not catch on as quickly. Highly engaged in meetings, he also holds a clear picture of the monthly and annual calendars in his mind. These traits indicate his level of comfort in the role of chief executive officer. Had he not felt the call to vocational ministry, he likely would have run a business or other large organization.

Pastor Langley enjoys a warm rapport with the GVBC congregation. Though a gifted preacher, he sometimes slips in his delivery of words. “Holy Spirit fill us” might become “Holy Spillit fear us!” Self-deprecating about these occasional glitches, he laughs along with the congregation.

A Foundation for Growth

The official reporting of the church split reads more like negative space in the annual reports for that year—very little was said about it. GVBC desired to move on under the direction of their new pastor rather than rehashing a long-standing disagreement.

Deeper knowledge of the Bible and deeper relationships through small groups came to the forefront as two of Pastor Langley’s goals when he started his ministry at GVBC.³⁷ Because many at GVBC already participated in Target Ministries and Sunday services, it took several years to develop a flourishing Community Group ministry. Today, many Community Groups have formed and are a major component of the church’s ministry. In 2013, GVBC Community Groups studied the subject of forgiveness, followed by the “Real Forgiveness” sermon series delivered by Pastor Langley and the pastoral staff.³⁸

Since arriving, Pastor Langley and the board of deacons streamlined GVBC’s constitution. Board members used to hold responsibility to research and advocate for ministries within the church. Today, committees make recommendations to the board for their consideration and vote. This division of management took place over about five or six years and closely follows how major corporations make decisions.³⁹

Today, ministries at GVBC fall into either the “Core” or “Target” category, with Core Ministries deemed essential to the work of the church, such

as Youth Ministry or Worship. Target Ministries can change over time or disappear completely with changes in society. Target Ministries presently include the Ukulele Jammers, Prime Timers, Hula Ministry, and Crocheting Crusaders.

The Nehemiah Building Project

In 2000, the church undertook the largest building project in its history, “The Nehemiah Project.” With much planning, prayer, and a Capital Stewardship Campaign, GVBC demolished the Christian Education building (C.E. Hall), which stood since 1951; built the Community Hall (gymnasium) and new staff offices; and joined the new facilities to the existing sanctuary by a glass narthex. An upstairs chapel and state-of-the-art classrooms round out the impressive structure.

The Nehemiah Project took longer and cost more than projected, but it also draws people from the surrounding area by its very existence. On March 10, 2007, GVBC held a celebratory open house to invite the community in to view and tour the new facilities.

Pledges to the Nehemiah Project fell off somewhat after the September 11, 2001, terrorist attack and the financial downturn of 2008. GVBC seeks to retire its bank loans as soon as possible, and much progress has been made as of this writing.

GVBC By the Numbers

Simple numbers alone do not tell the story of Pastor Langley’s ministry, but they are nonetheless impressive. From the 1994-1995 annual report, Sunday attendance hovered around 400 people per week. In 2013, GVBC saw closer to 600 people per Sunday across three services: two English-speaking and one Japanese (Nichigo). The church’s budget has approximately tripled over the same period.

The Present Demographics of GVBC

GVBC’s complexion has changed with the changing Gardena community. Third and fourth generation Japanese Americans (Sansei and Yonsei respectively) find other areas of the South Bay more desirable for educational and economic opportunities and now live elsewhere.



Nehemiah Building Project Groundbreaking Ceremony

Additionally, non-Japanese Asians attend GVBC in increasing numbers.

Changes in the Nichigo Congregation

In 1988, Pastor Toshikatsu Kamiyama succeeded Pastor Kunihiko Amano as Nichigo Pastor and served twelve years. Due to the leadership vacuum that had existed at GVBC prior to Pastor Steve's coming, Nichigo functioned as a separate organization from the English-speaking congregation. Pastor Bunso Otani, Pastor Kamiyama's successor, describes this arrangement as a "duplex church," where two congregations occupy the same building but have little overlap.⁴⁰ Problems of accountability can arise from this arrangement, and it did not reflect GVBC's history as a single church speaking two languages. In a 2000 meeting, the board of deacons reminded Pastor Kamiyama of the historic structure of GVBC, the senior pastor's responsibility to oversee both groups, and the need to bring the two congregations back together. Pastor Kamiyama did not receive the news well. Much to Pastor Steve's shock, he submitted his resignation the following day.

Despite the abrupt end of Pastor Kamiyama's ministry at GVBC, his thirty-two years should not be overlooked. In a 1999 farewell letter to the church, he

noted some of his ministry activities of the year. He baptized fifty-five people and conducted thirty-six funeral services. He acknowledged the difficulty in bringing the Japanese to faith in Christ due to the transient nature of the Nichigo congregation and Japanese cultural barriers that prevent acceptance of the Gospel.

The Nichigo is now a Core Ministry of GVBC. Funding does not come from the mission's budget but rather from the general fund of the church. Similar to other Core Ministries, the Nichigo pastor chairs the ministry and reports to Pastor Steve and the board of deacons. Pastor Otani describes this structure as a "church-within-a-church," and feel that it is preferable to either a duplex or mission church arrangement.⁴¹

Pastor Bunso Otani

Pastor Bunso and his wife Yukimi received a nice write-up in the July 2010 GVBC Spirit Newsletter to celebrate their retirement from vocational ministry. The following information comes from this article as well as an interview with Pastor Otani in June of 2014.

Pastor Otani trained as an electrical engineer at the California Institute of Technology. He came to know Christ in graduate school and then entered Dallas Theological Seminary. He and Yukimi met in Japan

and served twenty years as missionaries with the Brethren Church (1968-1988). Connected to GVBC through Yukimi's friends and sisters from San Diego, Sanaye Nagami and Keiko Imatomi, GVBC sought a Nichigo pastor and learned of the Otanis.⁴² The Otanis joined GVBC's staff in August of 2000. Pastor Otani promised ten years of service to the church before he wished to retire.

Pastor Bunso and Pastor Steve enjoyed a close partnership and shared a common vision and ministry goals. Pastor Otani desired to reach Japanese living in an area along the 405 freeway from Santa Monica to Long Beach known as the "405 crescent." Prior to arriving at GVBC, Pastor Otani became aware of Pastor Rick Warren's "Purpose-Driven Church," and he wished to implement these ideas among the Nichigo. Pastor Steve heartily concurred, and both congregations adopted many of the "purpose-driven" ideas into their ministries.

During the Otani's decade of ministry at GVBC, Pastor Bunso laid a firm foundation and did much to bring the two congregations together. He felt strongly that the church constitution, as well as the membership and discipleship course materials, be translated into Japanese, and this work continues.

In terms of numbers, the Nichigo remained about the same size from the time Pastor Nishimoto to the time of Pastor Otani, with average attendance through 2009 at about fifty-five people per Sunday. These numbers again reflect a more transient group of people than those in the English-speaking congregation.

In 2011, Pastor Eiji Osato and his family joined the GVBC staff as the Nichigo Pastors, coming from the mission field in Thailand. The Osatos continued along the course charted by Pastor Otani. A stronger connection exists today between the Nichigo and English-speaking congregations, with a bilingual service one Saturday per month, and the outreach to Japanese students on local campuses. Pastor Osato has seen growth in the Nichigo membership, and the congregation swiftly outgrew the small upstairs chapel and now meets in the sanctuary for Sunday services. Attendance frequently tops 100 people with continued growth.



Pastor Bunso Otani and Mrs. Yumiki Otani

The Osato's arrival at GVBC directly followed the March 11, 2011, tsunami in Japan. The tsunami galvanized the GVBC Missions Committee into realizing our missions efforts needed to focus on Japan as well as one or two other nations instead of the previous and more scattered approach. Strong ties bond the Osatos to the Rifu Oasis Chapel in the Sendai area of Japan, and GVBC is pursuing an ongoing relationship and cultural exchange with the Rifu Church. In 2012, GVBC hosted Pastor Makito Matsuda of Rifu on the one-year anniversary of the tsunami. Pastor Langley, Pastor Osato, and GVBC board member Stan Terasaki traveled to Japan to visit the Rifu Oasis Chapel. GVBC also sent a team to Rifu to help with a summer camp in 2013, and at the time of this writing, a team of four GVBCers just returned from two weeks there helping again with Rifu's summer program. Pastor Makito Matsuda has requested another GVBC team for the summer of 2015 to continue the partnership between our churches.

Pastor Osato still feels a spiritual burden for the nation of Thailand and plans to lead a mission team to help install a water project in a remote village in

early 2015. His experience with the language and the culture will be a great asset.

Challenges of the Twenty-First Century Church

As a sample of challenges facing the twenty-first century church, in 2014 the GVBC Pastors delivered a series of sermons about the “iworld.” This theme comes from Apple’s iPod, iPad, and iPhone devices. “Selfie” photographs, pictures of oneself taken with an iPhone or other smart device, represent our world’s current obsession with technology and self. The iworld isolates individuals because technology cannot substitute for a relationship with God and others. Such a world will ultimately collapse. GVBC has been challenged to form authentic Christian community that runs counter to the iworld.

The pioneers that began GVBC also faced challenges within the culture unique to their time. They could not have foreseen the world in which we live, but they too forged a sustaining Christian community among Japanese Americans living in Gardena.

Gardena Valley Baptist Church Looking Forward

GVBC now looks outward to the community and the world. The stigma of World War II and the evacuation, far from forgotten, do not define this generation of Japanese Americans. Asian Americans today have more education and wealth than other ethnic groups in the United States, and GVBC members share in this success.

Since completing the Nehemiah Project buildings, GVBC hosts basketball and volleyball games on weeknights, occasional dramas and musicals, and many groups from the church and the community meeting within the church walls. A vibrant Nichigo congregation fills the sanctuary on Sunday mornings, and the Community Hall hosts two English-speaking services. GVBC’s future from today’s vantage point looks bright. May God’s faithfulness continue for another one hundred years and beyond.



EasterWorship Service in the newly complete Community Hall 2007

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37. Senior Pastor to GVBC Congregation, 1994-95 The Annual Report, 3.
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Adam Marshall lives in Torrance, California with his wife and teenage son. A history buff long before he was a teacher, Adam now teaches U.S. History at Marymount California University in Rancho Palos Verdes. Adam enjoys sharing his passion for all aspects of history with his students.

Prior to teaching, Adam toiled in ignominy in the corporate world for a decade while taking night classes to enter Pepperdine University, where he earned a master's degree in history in 2010. Adam credits his Pepperdine professors with teaching him valuable research and writing skills. These professors included the Dean of Seaver College Dr. David Baird, and his Thesis Advisor and 1998 Pulitzer Prize-winning historian, Dr. Edward J. Larson. Though a somewhat distant memory now, Adam also earned a bachelor's degree in geography from the University of Montana in 1990.

Adam enjoys popular histories and some popular fiction by authors such as Erik Larson, Paul Collins, James L. Swanson, and John Grisham because these authors tell interesting stories. Adam plans to publish a coming-of-age fiction based on his Hippie childhood in the near future, and he occasionally posts articles on LinkedIn.

Adam enjoys activities like hiking and fishing, boogie-boarding, playing the guitar, and spending time with friends and family.

