



A note from our friend Pam Hashimoto to United Church of Hyde Park



Thank you for the opportunity to share some thoughts of how the church influenced and supported my parents growing up. Church provided the children of immigrant parents an opportunity to achieve a sense of belonging, for many grew up in often poor, isolated Japanese American communities in California. Their parents left Japan around the turn of the century (early 1900's) into a country that was not always welcoming. That first generation was denied meaningful jobs and found work where they could, as janitors, handymen, gardeners, chauffeurs, domestics, and cleaning ladies often working 2 jobs with little time to raise their children. They were further handicapped not knowing the language and customs. Some parents even sent their youngest children to Japan to be raised by their grandparents until they reached school age, so they could save enough to provide for their children.

There were extraordinary individuals in the church in the Palo Alto and Covina communities where my parents were born and raised. These unsung heroes, and they are everywhere, saw a need to help these children acclimate to the American way of life, and introduced them to things American, like birthdays, holidays, and celebrations – joyful events. They formed girls and boys clubs for them and provided opportunities to meet other young people to talk, play sports, have fun, and discuss concerns, especially as they grew into young adults and began to personally feel the sting of discrimination building during the pre-war period.

Fortunately, my parents were in their early 20's when their families were taken from their homes, and had already developed a sense of identity. Residents in the relocation centers felt a need to share a sense of community and foster leadership in a

sometimes-chaotic and hostile environment, trying to create some semblance of normalcy for the children. Churches, Buddhist, Shinto and Christian, were started among the residents. My parents would tell us about The Friends or Quakers who helped them find temporary housing and moral support on leaving the relocation centers in Wyoming.

After the war, my parents settled in Chicago and each found transient housing in the Woodlawn area. They married in 1945, and found an apartment at 5531 Kenwood, after being told there was a landlord who was friendly and would rent to them.

We were fortunate that my parents settled in the Hyde Park community which welcomed and supported diversity. Actually, a church minister in a suburb of Chicago encouraged my parents to live in that community until members of his congregation strongly pressured him to stop. How lucky we were to land in Hyde Park! My brother, sister and I attended Ray School and Hyde Park High before we left for college and beyond. My parents continued to be active in the church, it's mission and activities, and were grateful they could raise their children in a community that indeed seemed color-blind in the days following the war.

Their ties and sense of belonging and commitment to church were strong all through their lives until their deaths in 1979 and 2011. How honored my dad would be to know there is a meeting room named for him at your church. The fellowship and wonderful, lasting friendships made throughout their years at The United Church of Hyde Park enriched their lives immensely and they would speak of them often.

I commend you on your continued vision and mission to promote and encourage diversity and inclusion in your community and beyond. Best wishes as you move forward in these uncertain times.

Pam Hashimoto

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