

Pastor's Reflections

Discussions and meetings continue to take place at Lake Park, as we discern God's will for the congregation's future. But, before I continue, it is important for all of you reading this to know that what happens in the future depends on what **YOU** are willing to do, or what **YOU** do NOT do! Our present situation is due to what **YOU** have done or not done! As the saying goes, "we reap what we sow."

While we cannot change the past; we can stop and change what we are doing to ensure that Lake Park's future is brighter and vibrantly growing. Sure, numbers are not the only gauge of the health of a congregation; it is when numbers in attendance on any given Sunday become perilously low (below 20).

The California-Nevada Annual Conference has instructed congregations to take the "Congregational Vitality Assessment Survey" before our Annual Church Conference this year. Lake Park's is on Sunday, November 9th, at 4:00pm (3:30pm with the SPRC). The members of the Administrative Council and I will be performing the assessment in October. The Survey is from the book, *Vital Signs, A Pathway to Congregational Wholeness* by Dan R. Dick. Each pastor has been instructed to read the book. The book acknowledges that The United Methodist Church "isn't well. The twentieth century witnessed an almost constant decline in church membership, per member giving, worship attendance, Sunday school participation, mission giving, evangelistic outreach and invitation, and community involvement. Competition from schools, civic organizations, jobs, and leisure activities demanded more and more time, eventually infringing on the sacred space/time of Sunday morning."



The book highlights the four types of congregations: *vital* (congregations that are both stable and growing – the ideal we are all to work towards), *dystrophic* (congregations that are growing, but are unstable), *decaying* (congregations that are both declining and unstable), and *retrogressive* (congregations that are declining, but stable).

Vital churches focus on ministry and mission work, establish rigorous standards for membership and participation. They

experience the transforming power of God's Spirit in individual lives, and in both the internal and external community; and they demand the very highest levels of sacrifice and commitment. People are energized, motivated, excited, and engaged. "Church is not simply a part of their lives – they **are** the church twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week," every day of the year.

While **dystrophic** churches are growing, they "rely on the pastor and paid staff, have a high proportion of resources poured into the building and grounds, high levels of inactivity or 'representative' (few provide the work) ministry, low or no awareness of the true impact of ministry and programs, and little or no membership accountability." Most dystrophic congregations hire an excessive amount of staff to make sure everything runs smoothly. Pastors often put in sixty, seventy, and eighty plus hours a week to direct the administration of the church, while participants are "passive".

Morale in **decaying** congregations is dismal. The energy level is low, and there is often a sense of hopelessness.

"Congregations lack a compelling vision and a clear sense of identity and purpose. People want things to be better, but don't want to change. People want newcomers, but fear strangers. People want children, but no disruption or noise. People want the future to look more like the 1950s. In fact, people in decaying congregations don't really seem to know what they want; they just know they aren't content with what they've got....In the majority of decaying congregations, the local church is an end in itself, not a means to a greater end. Most people in decaying churches feel that the church exists for their benefit."

Finally, we have **retrogressive** churches. They are highly focused, highly stable congregations that are losing participants. These congregations make the decision to do just one or two things very well rather than a variety of things less well. They become known for their area of specialization. Often times, however, members will leave after a decision to have a specialized ministry is made, as they feel the church is not meeting their needs. Those remaining are highly committed to participate in ministry and leadership. Participant giving is also high. There are high standards for membership and participation - much is

expected of all people. Their focus is predominantly outward – meeting an identified need of the community or a specific group of people in the community.

So which group do think Lake Park is in? The survey will identify it for us.

One of the important messages of the book for me is the fact that we have NO accountability for membership. We do not expect, nor do we demand, people to live up to their membership vows: *“As members of this congregation, will you faithfully participate in its ministries by your prayers, your presence, your gifts, and your service?”* Have you faithfully fulfilled these vows to the highest possible level?

I close by sharing with you the last two paragraphs of the Introduction of Dick’s book:

“There is one important message to share from vital congregations: Vitality is neither simple nor easy. There is a very good reason why more churches aren’t vital: It is hard work. Perhaps the single greatest challenge to vitality is that it requires us to be Christian. We too often confuse being Christian with being nice. We fail to make difficult decisions, challenge inappropriate behaviors, hold people accountable, or establish developmental goals and standards that require real sacrifice and commitment. Make church easy is the opposite of making the church faithful. Vital churches challenge us to remember that the church is God’s, not ours, and being Christian disciples is more involved than simply believing in Jesus as the Son of God.

“Our world needs what the church, at its best, has to offer: grace, mercy, love, forgiveness, hope, vision, and justice. To love as God loves, to be just, kind, merciful, and grace-filled requires that we become fully alive, fully committed, healthy, and whole. To be the church for the world requires that we become vital.”

May we all search our hearts to see the part we each played, or did not play, to bring about the situation Lake Park finds itself in. Then may we ask the Spirit’s empowering presence to guide us and make us better disciples of Christ.

Blessings always,

Barbara

Continuing our Journey Through The Uncommon Lectionary

“David’s Legacy”

Sept. 7: Psalm 91 and Psalm 139
“His Love for the Lord”

“Faithful Servants”

Sept. 14: Amos 5:14-24 and Amos 9:11-15
“Justice Rolls Down Like Waters”

Sept. 21: Hosea 1:1-11 and Hosea 3:1-5
“One Forgiveness at a Time”

Sept. 28: Micah 5:1-15 and Micah 6:1-8
“What Does the Lord Require”



Care Corner

May we all lift **John Golden** in our prayers to God. John received the news that he has cancer and will be undergoing chemotherapy. He asks your prayers and caring thoughts during this difficult time.

Please hold the following in prayer:

Art and Kristina Black
Art and Ida Inouye
Ellen St. Thomas
Daniel Thompson

John and Janet Golden
Ruby Ouye and family
Terry and Mary Takaki
Karie Yamashita & family



In and Around Lake Park

by Sachi Kajiwara

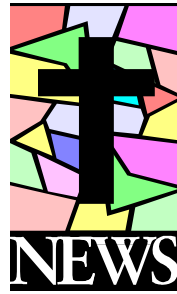
From the *United Methodist Reporter*: “as the Immigration issues are becoming more prominent in the media, it is interesting to see how some churches are responding. Churches in the Texas Conference are helping Latino congregations build new church buildings of their own, teaching English as a second language, starting Bible Study classes, as well as other ways by being the church in mission.”

In the meantime, there is a struggle going on in Estonia where retired pastors, and their widows, need pension help. Estonian pastors in their 80s are still serving churches because they cannot live on the pension they would receive. Widows in their 80s receive no pension from the church at all. One widow reported that she lives with her sister, while another survives by living with her children.

As reported before, the issue of homosexuality came up again in the General Conference. After much discussion for three hours, they finally arrived at a decision of voting in favor of the minority report to leave the words of the 2004 Discipline intact despite the many amendments that were presented. The General Conference accepted the minority report, by a vote of 517-416, to retain the current stance on homosexuality, which reads: “The United Methodist Church does not condone the practice of homosexuality and considers this practice incompatible with Christian teaching.”

Locally, Leo Saito was dismissed on August 8, from Piedmont Gardens where he had been receiving Physical Therapy after his partial hip replacement operation. He has caregivers during the day to help him out, so he’s now back home. He’s in fine spirits and we hope to see him back in church soon.

In a recent telephone conversation with Helen Yoshida she said that the casts have been removed from both broken arms. She was holding the phone with her right hand but says she is not yet able to use her left; however, with continued therapy, she will regain motion in that arm as well. Little by little she will be able to do more and more for herself. We wish her a speedy and pain-free recovery.



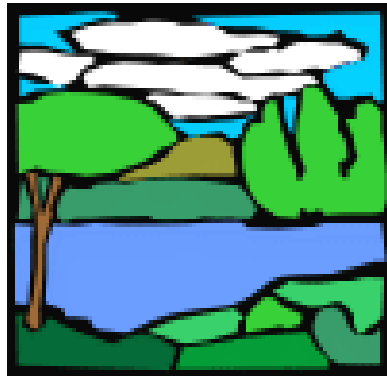
It was good to see Frank and Miye Takeuchi in our congregation again! And Eva Tsoi was present another Sunday. So many of our members now have one physical problem or another, and it is a joy to see them when they are able to make it to our service. We pray for their increasing strength and spirit.

Lake Park’s choir was on vacation in August. Our Music Director, Ellen St. Thomas, went to Florida for a week to help celebrate her aunt’s 80th birthday. Jim Meredith made a trip to Italy, taking some stops in the U.S. on the way; our former organist, Sara Stalder, substituted for Jim while he was on vacation. We had special music every week. Ron Fujie played Debussy and Bach pieces on the clarinet the first Sunday. Rev. Barbara and Ellen St. Thomas sang “You Raise Me Up” as a duet on Aug. 10th. The next Sunday, Schubert songs were sung by Elliott Nguyen, a young baritone who is starting college in September and who presented his senior recital here at Lake Park earlier in the month. On Aug. 24th, Choral Cosmo under the direction of Keiko Kagawa-Hamilton of Palo Alto was our guest choir. Lake Park is fortunate to have such wonderful musical performers to enhance our worship.

At the end of July, Rev. Gary Barbaree was our guest preacher. It was like a homecoming because when he was a graduate student at Pacific School of Religion, he was a pastoral Intern at Lake Park, so he remembered many of the congregation from our younger days. On August 17th, Rev. John Hadsell, now Professor Emeritus of San Francisco Theological Seminary, was our guest speaker. His well-received message was entitled “Celebrating Green Spirituality.”

Rev. Barbara and Sachi again attended the 5-day Lake Tahoe Fellowship Retreat. This year the leader was Rev. David Nieda of Blaine UMC in Seattle. His theme was “Love Comes First.” He says it is a word we use often and loosely (“... loved my trip,” etc.), but think of the courage it takes to love as Christ loved. In our groups, we tried to consider love, and how to *express* love, more seriously. We were given a list of questions to ponder, such as remembering a visit to a new church: to love as Christ loved. In our groups, we tried to consider love, and how to *express*

love, more seriously. We were given a list of questions to ponder, such as remembering a visit to a new church: were we greeted in a formal way, or in a loving way? Besides the discussion groups, there was a choice of workshops: calligraphy, card making, knitting caps for babies and chemo-therapy patients; and one in personal massage where we were each given a nickel to place on the back of our hand, the weight of which was the amount of pressure needed to massage a bruise or a pained knee. (It works--and we were able to keep the nickel, too!) There were also excursions (to golf, to shop, to “invest” money in Reno) an amateur performance night, and lots of laughter and good fellowship. The first night we were there, there was an extraordinary pink sunset. We were told it was caused by ash and smoke in the air from the many forest fires; but our skies were blue and clear the rest of the days; and the weather was wonderful! Sixty-four people (aged 1 to 96) came---from Utah, Washington, Wyoming, and all over California. This was more people than in 2007, and by far the best! The experience of this Retreat is one that you want to repeat, year after year. Maybe some of you would like to attend in 2009!



Please note the beautiful new light fixtures in the Sanctuary. Thanks to Steve Derreberry and the electrician, who had to build a scaffold to install the new fixtures, it all looks bright now.

Please continue to pray for those who are traveling, recovering from an illness, and any others you might know who need your prayers.



Let There Be Light!!!



Thank you to all the Trustees for their help in making the unanimous selection of the light fixtures that now grace our sanctuary and Horikoshi Chapel. How beautiful they are; and what light they put off! We can now see, especially at night for those evening services! Special thanks to Tsugiye Oshika, Steve Derreberry and Rev. Barbara for assisting with the backbreaking work of unpacking the fixtures, carrying them from the parking lot and examining them for defects and then repacking the fixtures. We wish to especially thank Steve for working alongside the electrician in putting up the fixtures. This saved Lake Park a lot of money, because the electrician did not have hire another helper. **“Thank You,” Steve!!!**

Additional “thank yous” to Karie Yamashita, Hugh and Irene Lee, Steve and Rev. Barbara for moving the old fixtures to the back of the storage shed and out of site until they can be hauled away. We also appreciate Hugh for contacting someone to haul them away.

Dedication of the new lights will be Sunday, Oct. 26th, during the worship service. All those who donated to the special Trustee Fund will be invited to attend this celebration!



Holly Fujie to be New Head of California State Bar Association



Holly Fujie (Ron’s sister), has been elected president of the State Bar of California. She is only the third woman chosen to head the Bar since it was established by the legislature in 1927 as an administrative arm of the California Supreme Court to serve the public and seek to improve the State’s justice system.

Holly, who is associated with the Los Angeles law firm of Buchalter Nemer Fields & Younger, will be sworn in as the 84th president of the 217,000-member organization at the State Bar’s annual meeting in Monterey on September 27th. She was elected by her colleagues on the Board of Governors on the first ballot.

**Way to go, Holly!
CONGRATULATIONS on this great honor!**

Highlights from the Administrative Council Meeting on August 6, 2008

Correspondence received: None

Reports

- **Spiritual Growth:** no report
- **Finance/Treasurer:** Ron Fujie. Presented partial financial report, January through July 2008; income data was unavailable at time of preparation.
- **Care & Nurturing:** no report
- **Trustees** – Steve Derreberry. Soliciting bids from ornamental iron contractors for handrail from sidewalk to front of church. ♦ New lights have been hung in public areas of the church. New fixtures, which everyone likes, hold cfl (compact fluorescent) screw-in light bulbs, using only 138 watts per fixture; old lights used 500 watts per fixture - big savings on energy costs, yet fixtures provide more light! To avoid paying two electricians, Steve helped contractor from Bay Area Electric - Job took about two weeks. Balcony and Horikoshi Chapel were done first, so to experiment with differently-shaded bulbs to see which quality of light looked best. Lastly, high ceiling of sanctuary was done, where scaffolding was erected. That left only the clean-up and disposal of the old fixtures. “Thanks to the Trustees for assisting in the choice of light fixtures, special thanks to Tsugiye and Rev. Barbara for all their assistance, and also to Kumiko --- without her support, I couldn’t have spent so much time on this.”
- **Worship** – Sara Stalder. Rev. John Hadsell will be guest speaker while Rev. Barbara is off August 17th.
- **Music** – Ron Fujie. Elliot Nguyen will present his senior vocal recital at Lake Park on Thursday, Aug 7th, and provide special music at our worship service on the 17th.
- **JASEB** – Ron Fujie. At present, the top priority is the search for a new executive director.
- **Pastor’s Report** – “Thank You” to My Lifeguards! . . . Ron Fujie, Marlene Yamashita, Sandra Alexander and Steve Derreberry for helping plan our path into the future for Lake Park.” They meet every Tuesday night to discuss how to grow a vibrant congregation that is doing Christ’s work in the world. The church needs to be more than a social club. Waiting to hear when the Dist. Sup’t will next meet with us.
 - ♦ The hope and prayer is for Option Groups to continue exploring ways to effect change necessary for growth and vitality, and

and prioritize steps to achieve their goal. ♦ Church Conference is on Sunday, Nov. 9th, at 4pm. Committee on Lay Leadership meets Sept. 14th & Oct. 12th. SPRC is to meet Sept. 21st & Oct. 5th.

Old Business - Still have no guidelines on figures for Montessori school lease renewal. ♦ No action on repairing the damages to the Horikoshi Chapel during an Eritrean service in May. Trustees gave Eritreans a deadline and warned of added cost if we have to get the contractor and oversee the work. After reminding them their worships ran over the agreed time, they finished by 7pm; but gradually their service gets longer and longer. Instead of over-flowing into the hallway, they now all crowd into the Chapel, where maximum is 24. Need another meeting with Merhawi and pastor to go over the rules. ♦ Received inquiries from groups looking for space to worship in own language: Cambodian Methodists and Korean congregation. ♦ Discussed John Golden and Leo Saito’s vision of multiple language congregations under one roof. What kind of relationship would we want: landlord-tenant? One congregation?

New Business - Tsugi suggested a special Sunday to thank those who gave money for trustee improvements---perhaps after the sidewalk railings are finished. (Oct. 26th is tentative date.) Suggested Steve consult with electrician about new lights for entry to Sanctuary. ♦ Leo has volunteered to speak on Laity Sunday, Oct. 19th.

[For details on any of above, please see the reports and/or Minutes.]

Next meeting – Sept. 3, 2008 at 7:30pm.

Convener is Ron Fujie; Recorder is Rev. Barbara

Calendar review:

- Sep 4 – Choir Practice resumes - 7:30 pm
- Sep 11 – Nichigo Bible Study - 1:30 pm
- Sep 14 – Plowshare items due
- Sep 14 – Committee on Lay Leadership meeting
- Sep 19–21 - UMW Mission Education Event – Santa Nella, CA
- Sep 21 – SPRC meeting (after worship)
- Sep 24 – Options Meeting with District Superintendent – 7:30
- Sep 25 – Nichigo Worship Service - 1:30 pm
- Sep 27 – Bay View District Annual Meeting – Castro Valley
- Oct 5 – SPRC meeting (after worship)
- Oct 12 – Committee on Lay Leadership meeting
- Oct 25 – UMW Annual Celebration – Napa, CA
- Nov 9 – Charge/Church Conference – 4:00 pm



Meetings on Lake Park's Future Continue

On Sunday, August 3rd, those present divided into the different option groups they had signed up for. In each group, ideas for possible programs and activities were lifted up.

Ideas from each group were then reported at the August 10th meeting, so that everyone is on the same page. Additional ideas were also listed. While it may have been understood, the overall objective of our endeavors was announced: "To grow a vibrant congregation that is doing Christ's work in the world."

While this meeting was advertised in the previous Plowshare and in the worship bulletins, attendance reached an all time low of **19!** While a few were out of town, it was determined that people intentionally stayed home, so they wouldn't have to participate in the meeting; which also led to the conclusion that people don't really care what happens to Lake Park.

Still Rev. Barbara and the Lifeguards believe that work needs to continue so that **God's** church will remain open for the future. Over the years, poor stewardship has resulted in the situation we find ourselves in.

Sunday, August 31st, the option groups will again meet to flesh out what needs to be done and what resources are needed for each of the items they have listed. Then the list will be prioritized.

All of this is in preparation for the visit of our District Superintendent, the Rev. Renae Extrum-Fernandez, on Wednesday, September 24th, at 7:30pm. She will help Lake Park narrow down the options.

So please mark your calendars. For those who do not drive at night, we will arrange transportation for you, even if it means Rev. Barbara has to pick you up!!! **Everyone needs to attend this meeting!**



"Thank You" Lifeguards!

So appropriately called, Rev. Barbara's Lifeguards have worked hard in preparing a path to the Promised Land, and saving Lake Park from steady decline. They are: **Ron Fujie, Marlene Yamashita, Sandra Alexander, and Steve Derreberry.** While we don't know if we will get to the Promised Land any time soon, their help has been invaluable!

Annual Church Conference in November

Please mark your calendars for this year's Annual Church Conference, scheduled for November 9th at 4:00pm. This will give everyone the opportunity to attend, as it will be in the afternoon. Lake Park has "Church" conferences, versus "Charge" conferences. The latter restricts attendance to those who serve on the Administrative Council. However, a "Church" conference is open to all who are interested.

At the Church Conference the business for the coming year will be voted on and discussed: committees are elected, pastor's compensation will be voted on and reports given.

This year, the results from the Congregational Vitality Assessment Survey will be presented. The assessment will be done by the members of the Administrative Council.

In preparation for the Church Conference, the **Committee on Lay Leadership** will meet on Sundays, September 14th and October 12th. The **Staff Parish Relations Committee** will meet on Sundays, September 21st and October 5th. Materials for these meetings will be going out shortly.



"Welcome Home" Event for Bishop Brown at Taylor Memorial UMC

Retired Bishop Leontine T.C. Kelly will be guest speaker at a worship service and reception honoring Bishop Warner H. Brown, Jr. and his family on their return to the California-Nevada Annual Conference – on Sunday, September 21 at 5 p.m. at Taylor Memorial United Methodist Church in Oakland, California. Taylor Memorial UMC is one of the churches Bishop Brown served as pastor. It is located at 1188 12th Street, Oakland, CA 94607.

Bishop Brown is returning to Cal-Nevada, from which he was elected to the Episcopacy, after heading the Rocky Mountain and Yellowstone Conferences. He is accompanied by his wife, Minnie J. Brown.

If you are interested in attending, please see Rev. Barbara.



September Tea Fellowship

Tsugiye Oshika and Ruby Ouye

SYCAMORE BAZAAR - El Cerrito
SUNDAY – SEPT. 21, 2008 - 12 noon to 5:00 pm

1:00pm & 2:00pm - Taiko by Kizakura Drummers
 2:45pm - Japanese Culture Presentation by Bunka Camp Kids

Sushi • Udon • Curry Rice
 Spam Musubi • Teriyaki Chicken
 Hamburgers • Hot Dogs • Skewered Beef
 Manju/Sweet Treats

Plants • Hidden Treasures
 Silent Auction • Games

DOOR PRIZES

Sycamore Congregational Church
 1111 Navellier Street - El Cerrito
 (510) 525-0727



WESLEY UMC (San Jose) ANNOUNCES ITS
76TH ANNUAL AKI MATSURI (FALL FESTIVAL)

SATURDAY, SEPT. 13TH - 11 am to 4 pm

Eat traditional American foods – plate lunch, *sushi*, chicken, *teriyaki*, *yaki soba*, *udon*, BBQ ribs, *manju* and other baked goods.

Shop for farm fresh fruits and vegetables, fragrant flowers and houseplants, and hand-made crafts.

Enjoy entertainment by San Jose Taiko, The Wesley 11:30 Band, Wesley Jazz Ensemble, the Wesley Ukulele Band and fun activities for children.

This old-fashioned church bazaar is in the heart of San Jose's Japantown at: **566 N. 5th Street - San Jose** with plenty of parking on 6th Street.

For more information: www.wesleysj.net
 or call: (408) 295-0367
 or e-mail: office@wesleysj.net



Plowshare Acknowledgements
July 13 to August 10, 2008

Special Gifts

Alexander, M/M George Memory of parents and son
 Miyazaki, Minako Honor of M/M Steve Derreberry's wedding anniversary
 Takeuchi, M/M Frank Thanksgiving for Frank's surgery and recovery
 Yamamoto, M/M Takeshi K. Memory of Fumi Virginia Tomita

St. Vincent de Paul Food Kitchen

Oshika, Tsugiye
 Saito, Dr Leo
 Takeuchi, M/M Frank (4 mo's)
 Anonymous(1)



☺ *Many Thanks* ☺



Floral Acknowledgements
July 22 to August 17, 2008

July 20: Tsugiye Oshika, in memory of Sono, Asa, and Linda Fujie-Baumann
 July 27: Theresa Narasaki, Glory to God
 Aug. 3: Rev. Barbara, in memory of mother, Peggy Horikoshi
 Aug. 10: Theresa Narasaki, in memory of Joe
 Aug. 17: Marlene Yamashita, in memory of father, Calvin

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Corrections

The dates of the Acknowledgements in the August Plowshare should have been June 15th–July 6th instead of from June 4th.

In the July Plowshare, Virginia Tomita's granddaughter's name was misspelled: her correct name is Tae Shimamoto.