

Views of the Vision

The Ministry of Gay and Andrew Hongo

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A NEW CHAPTER FOR CHRISTIAN VISION



Taylor Pagaragan

And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable people who will also be qualified to teach others. II Timothy 2:2

One of Christian Vision's goals has always been to train the next generation of young musicians to use their gifts for the Lord. That need had become particularly apparent recently, as I began thinking about moving toward semi-retirement and wanted to train someone to take over some of my day-to-day responsibilities. So for the past few years, I had been asking God to provide the perfect co-laborer He had in mind, someone with a variety of gifts: who could lead worship, who could help plan and execute musical programs for special church events, who could handle the administrative side of the ministry, and who – most importantly – had a heart for sharing the Good News. I'm happy to announce that the Lord has provided someone with all these capabilities and more in Taylor Pagaragan.

Taylor is the daughter of our longtime friends and ministry partners Kelly and Jeff Pagaragan. Kelly (formerly Kawazoe) and Jeff were members of our youth group at Kalihi Union Church, and we watched all five of their children grow up. The Pagaragans eventually moved to California, and once when Randy and I went to California for a concert tour, we asked the Pagaragan family (who were all very musical) to join our ministry team. I'll let Taylor take the story over from here – she explains the impact this had on her and her family:

In the summer of 2010, my family was blessed with the opportunity to travel and perform with Randy & Gay Hongo as they toured Japanese churches in Northern California. That experience changed the course of my and my family's life, as we felt God used that time to call us to Japan as long-term missionaries. My family then spent 3 years visiting churches both in Hawaii & California and sharing about God's heart for Japan, especially young people and students. Following the examples of our beloved music missionaries, we performed and spoke at many churches, several of which we owed our connections to touring there previously with Randy & Gay. Since moving to Japan with my family in 2014, we have continued to model our various ministries and outreaches after our predecessors. In other words, wherever we went, we aimed to fill it with the love of God through music and the "ohana spirit," just as the Hongos did.

Randy and I were so blessed to hear of how God used us to encourage this beautiful family to use their gifts for His glory. Praise the Lord! And as we kept in touch with the Pagaragans over the years, it was amazing to see them growing and flourishing in their ministry. I remember once when they were in Hawaii on home assignment reporting back to churches, I heard Taylor give a powerful testimony – in both English and Japanese! I was so impressed. She shared about how their family had started a ministry in Tokyo with the purpose of evangelizing young people. Taylor talked about one girl she had met who was suffering from depression and was prone to

suicidal thoughts – like many troubled young people in Japan. Taylor shared that she was building a friendship with this young woman and praying that she would come to know the freedom and love that comes from a relationship with Jesus Christ.

Taylor is a wonderful musician – she can sing, play piano, dance hula. But more important to me is Taylor's heart. When she worships, I see that she has a heart of worship, that her focus is always on bringing glory to God. When I heard that she was open to God moving her beyond her family's ministry in Japan, I asked her about coming on board to Christian Vision as our new executive director. After a period of prayer and discernment on both of our parts, we both felt confident God was blessing this step.

Taylor is hoping to start part-time with me in March, and I'll begin training her in all aspects of the ministry: serving at our home church (Kalihi Union) as well as reporting to our other supporting churches, managing the administrative aspects of the ministry, coordinating musical elements for services, funerals, and weddings. Taylor's work will enable me to be able to pull back from the day-to-day responsibilities, though I will still be providing spiritual leadership as president of Christian Vision.

So how do I feel about this transition? You know how there are all these movies where an aging diva sees a talented young woman taking over, and the diva is crushed? I'm not crushed at all. In fact, I'm so happy because I'm able to pass the baton on to the next generation. God has blessed me so much, taught me so much, gifted me with so much, that now I just want to pass it on. It also frees me to take some time off when I need to, knowing that there are capable hands to take over.



SHARING THE GOOD NEWS – ON THE RADIO!



Kokoro ni Hikario is a Japanese language, Christian radio program that began in Hawaii in 1981. Ten Japanese-speaking pastors take turns, each sharing a message with the Good News of Jesus Christ. It airs Monday through Friday from 2:45 to 3pm on KZOO radio station.

As I child growing up in Waipahu, I remember waking up every morning to the sound of my mother's radio. Mama moved to Hawaii in her 40s from Japan, so she always felt most comfortable in the Japanese language. She'd leave the radio tuned to Japanese stations all day long, every day. Although Mama had no interest in Christianity (she was a devout Buddhist at the time), when Kokoro ni Hikario started broadcasting, she listened every day.

Once Mama came to hear me sing at Makiki Christian Church. After the service, I introduced her to the Japanese pastor, Kuroda Sensei, and one church member who was a very well-known radio personality, Kitamura-san. Mama said to me, "Oh I know Kuroda Sensei and Kitamura-san. I hear them on the radio." She then proceeded to name all the Japanese pastors that took turns speaking on the radio. She said her favorite was Yuuichiro Nakano Sensei because he was very funny ("omoshiroi," she told me). I thank God that the messages she heard took root in her heart and after a lifetime as a Buddhist, she became a Christian at 82 years of age.

The highlight of 2020 I was really looking forward to was a ministry tour to Japan with my son, Andrew, and his wife, Meaghan. We were planning to go to Tokyo as well as the Sendai region to do evangelistic concerts and visit family. Well, because of corona-virus we had to postpone. And when July rolled around, I looked at my calendar and felt very sad, because I was supposed to have been in Japan from July 1 to 14.

But then, on July 13th, I got a call from Kalihi Union

Church's Japanese Pastor, John Barrow. He said, "This week is my turn to host Kokoro ni Hikario. Would you be willing to come for a taping session so I can interview you?" Even with my limited vocabulary and many mistakes (my Japanese is far from perfect), the Holy Spirit empowered me to speak of God's great work in my life. Pastor John did a good job of editing and adding songs from our Japanese CDs. He ended up giving me four spots that week, 15 minutes each! Although I was not able to be in Japan at this time, God allowed me to use my ability to speak Japanese to minister to the Japanese community here in Hawaii. I praise God that even a worldwide pandemic cannot stop His Gospel from going forward.

A CROSS COUNTRY MOVE FOR ANDREW



Andrew and Meaghan said good-bye to their lovely home in Mobile, Alabama.



Andrew leading worship with the praise team at Tracy Community Church.

As if 2020 didn't have enough going on, Meaghan and I decided to do a cross-country move in the midst of the coronavirus shutdown. We had been living in Mobile, Alabama, where Meaghan was completing her medical residency, and I was teaching journalism at the University of South Alabama. Meaghan's program wrapped up at the end of June (and by the way, thanks to all of you for your prayers – we survived residency!),

and the following week we packed all our worldly belongings into a PODS container, loaded the dog and a few suitcases into our Nissan, and embarked on the 34-hour drive from Alabama to California.

Having grown up in Hawaii, where anything more than 30 minutes is considered a long drive, the thought of spending 34 hours in a car seemed... torturous, to say the least. But hey, maybe it'll be an adventure, I thought, and given the fact that air travel was a little risky (and that we have a dog who loved car rides), we decided to give it a try. I'm happy to say that it was not nearly as horrific as I had thought it might be. The long stretches of open road allowed Meaghan and me to spend some quality time together; the dog slept happily most of the way in the backseat; and I have to say, the wide open spaces of the American West, particularly New Mexico and Arizona, were breathtaking.

I was in Mobile, Alabama, for a total of two-and-a-half years (Meaghan was there for three years – as she moved down to begin her residency six months before we got married). I never would have imagined that God would lead me to that small town on the Gulf Shore, but as I look back on it, I feel a fondness for Mobile and gratitude for the many blessings we experienced there. It was the city where I proposed to Meaghan and where we started our married life together; it was also the city where I last saw my father, when we spent Thanksgiving together just a few weeks before he passed. Most of all, we'll miss our friends from our church there, Covenant Presbyterian, friends we will cherish the rest of our lives.

But now for a new chapter! We've settled in a town called Tracy, a little more than an hour's drive from San Francisco. Meaghan is working as a pediatrician at a clinic in Modesto; I'm teaching journalism and documentary film at San Francisco State; and our house is less than an hour from Meaghan's family, in Oakdale. It's actually been the Lord's providence that we were able to move to California at just the right time. Meaghan's dad had been diagnosed with lymphoma earlier this year, and just a couple weeks after we moved out here, he began chemotherapy. So far, although the treatment can be rough, he's responding well and the cancer has been decreasing. While it's a very difficult time for the family, Meaghan and I are grateful that the Lord allowed us to be closer to them during this season to help out. Please pray for Meaghan's dad's healing!

Tracy is a really nice, safe, convenient neighborhood. We were blessed to find a house with a backyard for our dog Boaz, and I was particularly happy to find that there's an L&L's Barbecue less than ten minutes from our house. Spam musubi! We've started attending Tracy Community Church, and the pastor and congregation have been so warm and welcoming. I am helping with the worship team, and we've found a wonderful small group that meets weekly on Zoom.

For all of the many things we have to be thankful for, like many of you, there are also times when everything that has been going on in 2020 feels overwhelming. The isolation and loneliness of this seemingly never-ending pandemic; the stress of adjusting to a new job, a new city, a new community – it can be a lot. But the verse the Lord has led me to again and again is Ecclesiastes 3:11: *He makes all things beautiful in His time*. I remember that no matter the problems that I face today, the obstacles or anxiety or fear, God is using all of it to make something beautiful. If I can turn my attention from my problems to the Lord's character – His faithfulness, His wisdom, and His power – then perhaps I can begin to learn to trust in His timing. If ever we doubted that, we need only look at the Cross of Jesus Christ to know that He is the God who brings life from death, beauty from ashes, resurrection from the grave.

A COVID WEDDING



Left to right: Alan and Joy Nakamura, Pastor Clive Cowell, Kristie and David Lingenfelter, Malachi and Johanna Yonehiro, Lisa Ching, and Gay.



The groom receives best wishes from his parents via Zoom, just before the wedding ceremony.



Planning a wedding during a lockdown requires a lot of creativity and dependence on the Lord. Such was the case for my sister Joy Nakamura as she planned a wedding in September for her daughter, Kristie. Here are nine blessings for which we give thanks to God:

1. The venue: an outdoor wedding in the courtyard gazebo of Kalihi Union Church. Joy used her creativity and artistic gifts. She crafted beautiful flower garlands to grace the gazebo.
2. The minister: Pastor Clive Cowell became friend and mentor to Kristie and her husband, David Lingenfelter.
3. The singer: I felt very lonely singing *The Hawaiian Wedding Song* without Randy singing and playing the ukulele by my side. But it was my joy to provide the music singing a cappella – and I know Randy was watching and smiling from heaven.
4. The flowers: All florists were closed because of the pandemic, but Joy found a florist in Safeway that provided leis, a bouquet, and lovely haku headband for the bride.
5. The cake: All the bakeries were closed, but Kristie had a friend who was a professional baker who baked the wedding cake, cupcakes, and macaroons for favors.
6. The food: Natsunoya Teahouse made ono bentos and delivered to the church for a relaxed, casual reception.
7. The guests: Lisa and Steven Ching facilitated Zoom so family and friends near and far could join us via internet. David's parents from Pennsylvania, his brother and wife from Florida, and relatives from the mainland and Hawaii were all able to view the wedding.
8. The photographer: God provided a gifted photographer in Chey Sanders.
9. All praise and glory to our Lord for providing a most beautiful day. It lifts my spirits that even in this difficult time, God still gives us wonderful occasions to celebrate.

Indeed we praise God from whom all blessings flow! Congratulations to David and Kristie Lingenfelter who now reside in Florida.

A HUI HOU TO TWO BELOVED FRIENDS



Gay with Tom's wife, Sue, and children Tori and David.



Tom with his beloved family.



Kenny and Harriet Furuya, Aileen Asato, and Gay at Joy Fellowship.

Recently, I had the opportunity to sing at two different funerals, both for longtime friends and supporters of our ministry. In this time of great grief, it is so important to remember that Christians never really say good-bye; rather, we say, "a hui hou," which is Hawaiian for, "see you later!" – because we will see each other in heaven when we meet at Jesus' feet.

July 1, 2020 was the day that the Celebration of Life service was held for Tom Yamashiro. This day was Tom's birthday. It was also Randy's birthday. At that time, funerals were restricted to fewer than 50 people in the service and ten people at a time at the burial. My niece, Cheryl Toma Sanders, accompanied me on piano when I sang for the service, then on the ukulele when I sang for the burial.

It was a beautiful service. We reminisced about how we first met Tom and his wife, Sue, back in the 80's when Randy and I produced a musical drama called *The Cross and the Switchblade*, which told the story of David Wilkerson and his ministry to gang members in New York City. Sue was cast as a prostitute, and Tom played the part of her pimp. (Don't worry, the play was about how these characters became Christians!) Shortly after, Randy and I sang at their wedding.

Throughout the years, Sue and Tom remained close friends and encouraged us in our ministry. In their last years, both Tom and Randy had to go on dialysis, so Sue and I were able to support each other as we were both caregivers. I am sad at Tom's passing, but I am also joyful that both he and Randy are now in heaven enjoying the presence of Jesus in their resurrected, healthy bodies.

On October 4, 2020, we said farewell to another beloved friend, Aileen Asato. We held a memorial at the 7:15am worship service at Kalihi Union Church, and Pastor Steeper and I sang a duet to *People Need the Lord*, as Aileen had requested before her passing. We have known Aileen for many years through Kalihi Union Church and always appreciated what a wonderful prayer warrior she was. Whenever we traveled on ministry tours, we would give her our prayer requests and knew she'd be praying faithfully for us.

When Randy took his first trip to Israel with First Presbyterian Church in 1996, Aileen signed up to go, and Randy baptized her in the Jordan River. Aileen loved to travel and went on various missions trips. She had the gift of evangelism and was always leading people to the Lord. I especially appreciated Aileen's anointed hands – she had the gift of massage and would always work on my shoulders and neck!

Aileen was also responsible for introducing us to a friend who opened up many ministry opportunities for us on the mainland. Back in the 1990s, a Christian singer in California named Harriet Furuya was looking for a song to sing for her sister-in-law's wedding. Her friend at church, Doris Toma, said "Listen to this recording my sister, Aileen Asato, sent me from Hawaii. There is a song called *When Two Become One* that would be perfect for you to sing at the wedding. The singer, Gay Hongo, sounds just like you!"

Harriet called me, introduced herself, and asked if I had an instrumental track for that song. I said, "Yes, I'll be happy to send it to you." A few months later Harriet brought her family (including her newly married sister-in-law) to a concert we were giving in San Fernando Valley. They greeted us after the service and told us that Harriet sang our song at the wedding and it was a huge hit.

Then Harriet said, "Can you come sing at my church next time you come to California?" Not only did we sing at her church the next time; Harriet became our tour coordinator for many California tours after that. She and her husband, Kenny, would house us and drive us to all the concerts and sell CDs for us.

In 2012, when Randy went to City of Hope cancer hospital for eight months, the Furuyas loaned us their van and visited us weekly providing food and fellowship and prayers. Harriet is originally from Maui so they came to visit Hawaii often. On their last visit to Hawaii, they came to Joy Fellowship at Kalihi Union Church to sing. There, they saw Aileen Asato – the one who was responsible for introducing us all those years ago. God is so good!

Thank you, Aileen, for introducing me to Harriet who has become one of my best friends. Thank you also for all the massages you gave me and for being a prayer warrior for our family.



UPCOMING SPECIAL EVENT



Several years ago we celebrated the 38th anniversary of the International Japanese Christian Church. Left to right: Gay, Hiroko and Pastor Tomohiro Fuyuki, Pastor Eriya and Keiko Mitsuhashi, JoAnn Kaneshiro.

On December 20th, I have the special opportunity to sing a Christmas concert and share my testimony on a virtual YouTube church service! This concert will be featured on the International Japanese Christian Church's Facebook page. Please pray for God to anoint this bi-lingual concert to be a blessing to many during this difficult time.

I'm grateful to Pastor Tomohiro Fuyuki for inviting me to do this virtual concert. He is a wonderful pastor and longtime friend of ours whom we first met through our nephew, Mike Kaneshiro. We have partnered with Fuyuki Sensei many times over the years, singing for different evangelistic events and special services. This service is a little different – it'll be completely online because of COVID – but we are praying the Lord would still use it for His glory.

The concert will go online on December 20th at 10:30am. You can search for International Japanese Christian Church on Facebook, or go here:

<https://www.facebook.com/International-Japanese-Christian-Church-100163534936962/>



PHOTO GALLERY



Gay celebrated her birthday with family in Pearl City on the Fourth of July. Back row, left to right: Alan, Kristie, and Joy Nakamura, Pearl Toma, Wallace Kaneshiro, Joy and Laurie Libarios. Front row, left to right: JoAnn Kaneshiro and Gay.



Kalihi Union Church is still meeting in person (safely socially distanced in an open-air sanctuary). Gay leads worship from behind a protective plexiglass shield.



Gay sang Japanese songs and hymns for Auntie Connie Shinsato Yamauchi (her father's sister) and Auntie Helen Hongo (Randy's aunt) at Pearl City Nursing Home. Auntie Helen went home to be with the Lord shortly thereafter.



Gay's current worship team that leads at Kalihi Union Church every other Sunday. Left to right: Gay, Marion and Vernon Von, Lois Pannabacker.



In May, all of my pianists were unavailable, so 84-year-old Buddy Macapagal and his wife, Robin, came to my rescue to help lead worship. Left to right: Robin, Buddy, Gay, Vernon, Marion.



Pastor Jonathan Steeper occasionally joins our worship team

ANNOUNCEMENT:

Feel free to email us at rgongo@hotmail.com if you would like to transition from the hard copy of this newsletter to our e-newsletter.

Thank you for your prayers and financial gifts to this ministry.

If you'd like to donate, you can do so online at www.rghongo.com.

We have reached our building fund goal for the Hongo Music Center. We are still accepting donations for this project, but they will now go toward programs and scholarships.



These musicians, all in their 80's, faithfully serve the Lord twice a month at Kalihi Union Church, meeting at 6:30am to prepare for the early service. Left to right: Marion, Vernon, Gay, and Nancy Shim.

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Merry Christmas and a Blessed New Year! From the Hongo Family
Thank you for your prayers and support that make this ministry possible!




Christ the Savior is Born