

Views of the Vision

The Ministry of Gay and Andrew Hongo
and Janete Fujiki

August 2023

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Japan Mission Trip

"How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can they preach unless they are sent? As it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!" (Romans 10:14-15)

It was in July 2020 that we were supposed to go on our mission to Japan, but Covid restrictions prevented us from entering the country. This past June, three years later, God finally opened the door for us to go on our much-anticipated mission trip to Japan.

Because I was born in Japan and lived there until I was six years old, I have always had a heart for the Japanese people. There is much work to be done in a country where less than 1% of the population are Christians.

Our first stop was in Hitachi (just outside of Tokyo) at the home of Seiichi, Randy's first cousin. Seiichi's mom, Aunty Mio Hongo Oe is the last surviving sibling of Randy's dad, Glenn Taiyo Hongo. Randy's grandfather, Torakiyo Hongo, immigrated to Hilo, Hawai'i from Kumamoto, Japan. Andrew gave his son, Paul, the Japanese name Torakiyo after him, and Paul is now the last male descendant in our line to carry on the Hongo name.

Aunty Mio, now 100 years old, is living in a care home where Covid restrictions prevent her from receiving visitors. Because she cannot see her family, she sometimes gets very lonely. At first we were told we couldn't visit her, but at the last minute, we found out we could wait in the parking lot and possibly catch a glimpse of Aunty Mio on her way back from art therapy.

As we waited in the parking lot, we lifted up a quick prayer: "Lord, please allow us to see Aunty Mio so we can encourage her and minister to her!" A few minutes after that we saw a staff person wheeling Aunty Mio through the parking lot in her wheelchair.

We ran to her, shouting, "Hi, Aunty Mio!" She

recognized us right away and burst into a big smile when she saw Paul run up to greet her. Seiichi said it was the first time he saw her smile in nine months. She gave us a beautiful hand woven box she had made in her therapy session that day. We laid hands on her and prayed for her healing, and then as she was wheeled her away we sang "Aloha 'Oe," her favorite Hawaiian song.

That evening Seiichi invited his sister, Keiko, and her husband to have dinner with us. We sang "Never Far from Home" in Japanese and I shared my testimony of how I was raised in a Buddhist home but then became a Christian at the age of 19. After I shared the Gospel with them, they said their mom was a Christian and took them to Sunday school until Seiichi was 11 and Keiko was 14. However they don't go to church now and have a Buddhist altar in their home in reverence to their departed father, who was Buddhist. I asked if they would like to receive Jesus as their Lord and Savior and they all nodded "yes." I led them in prayer in Japanese and prayed for God to lead them to know Him more.

Later, Andrew told me that he was so impressed not just with my fluency in ministering Japanese, but also in my boldness and the Holy Spirit's anointing on my sharing. I know that I was able to do this only because of God's grace and your prayers on our behalf. Please pray that the seeds planted in their hearts will take root and grow.



100-year-old Mio Hongo Oe, Randy's aunty, was delighted to meet Paul.

Our second stop was in Saitama, a suburb of Tokyo. The couple hosting us, Yoshisuke and Naoe Noguchi, came down with Covid the day before we arrived. They felt so badly that they couldn't have us in their home, but they were able to arrange for two rooms at a nearby hotel. One floor below our hotel room was the public bath, or "ofuro" that I really enjoyed. Paul kept busy roaming around the open lobby and made friends with the staff. We were within walking distance of Omiya and Shintoshin train stations with lots of shops nearby.

The Noguchis are long-time friends and supporters of our ministry. They had hosted Randy and me many times in their home, and they loved Randy very much. Mrs. Noguchi remembered how Randy would always teach her English idioms, since she taught an English-language class for children in her neighborhood — phrases like "the blind leading the blind" or "home is where you hang your hat." This was the first time I saw them since Randy went to be with the Lord, and although we all miss Randy very much, it was also healing to reminisce about the many wonderful times we all had together.

The Noguchis run a juku program (after school tutoring) next door to their home. A few years ago, they started church services in the school building. On Sunday morning, we did two programs at this home church.

The first was the weekly 9:30am worship service. We shared our music and testimonies, and Naoe was supposed to give the message. Because she was in Covid isolation she wrote out her message and had an elder read it to the congregation. Her message was based on Philippians 4:4, which says, "Rejoice in the Lord always." It was inspiring to hear that even in her sickness she was not separated from the goodness of the Lord.

The second program was a special 11:30am concert for neighborhood friends. In addition to our testimonies, we did fun Hawaiian numbers: Andrew did a hula with various Hawaiian implements to "Shall We Dance," and I taught "Pearly Shells" to the audience. We also sang "Never Far from Home," the song that Randy wrote for us to sing with Andrew when he was a little boy. This time, Andrew, Meaghan, and I sang the song together with Baby Paul onstage with us. When it came to the final chorus, Paul started waving his hands in the air with a big smile on his face. The audience loved it.

One couple that attended this concert was Naoe's "okomeyasan," which means "the person who sells rice." In Japan, there are stores that will mill rice according to your specification: what percentage wheat germ to leave in the polished rice. The okomeyasan and his girlfriend were very touched by the service so I gave them copies of our Japanese CD's. I told them "It is my gift to you. Please come again to church." Please pray that the Lord would continue to work in their hearts!

Even though the Noguchis couldn't attend these services in person, they were able to watch the live-stream. Later that day they came out to their backyard and were able to see Paul through the glass doors. The next day, Monday, they tested negative so were able to take us to a beautiful kaiseki, a multi-course Japanese dinner. The dinner included a sashimi dish, and Meaghan and Andrew said it was the best sashimi they had in their lives.



Naoe provided pa'u skirts for the volunteers who danced "Pearly Shells." Mr. Jimbo was a good sport.



Mr. & Mrs. Noguchi were unable to host us in their home because they had Covid, but we saw them through the window.



Paul loved the multi-course kaiseki dinner.

We also did an evangelistic Hawaiian concert at the nearby Warabi Evangelical Free Church. Two hula teams from the area were there to minister with us, both of them started by Meiko Nakano of Honolulu Christian Church. Meiko's husband, Pastor Yuuichiro Nakano, partnered with us on many missions trips to Japan, and Meiko herself started a number of Christian hula ministries all over Japan.

One hula group, called "Hau'oli," was headed by Tamura Sensei, who had been trained by Meiko Sensei and took over for her as head teacher. Some members of the group were from various local churches, and other members were not yet Christians. The other hula group, called "Makana," was the hula ministry of Warabi EFC. They had also been trained by Tamura Sensei.

We had a one hour rehearsal right before the concert, because it was the only time the hula dancers could rehearse with us singing live. Rehearsal and sound check went well, but my voice got hoarse and I was struggling to sing. Andrew and Meaghan laid hands on me and prayed that despite the circumstances, I would be able to sing in the power of the Holy Spirit. I was encouraged that many prayers from Hawai'i and California were upholding me. I also relied on II Corinthians 12:9-10: "But he said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.' Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong." God used these verses to assure me that His grace was sufficient and that when I am weak, His power is made perfect.

The concert began and though I struggled at first my voice got stronger as the program went on. Truly it was the power of the Holy Spirit. I shared my testimony in Japanese. Andrew spoke in English with an excellent translator. The hula teams danced beautifully. It was a very blessed time for us all.



Tamura Sensei learned hula from Meiko Nakano. This is her hula team, "Hau'oli"



Also joining us was Warabi Church's Hula Team, "Makana".

From Andrew

While I have been on many missions trips to Japan with my parents and our home church over the years, this was my first time going as a husband and father with my wife, Meaghan, and my son, Paul. I was very nervous about traveling with a one-year-old: Would he cry non-stop the entire eight-hour flight from Honolulu to Tokyo? Would he be able to sleep in an unfamiliar hotel room? Would he be fussy and cranky the entire time? Well, I'm happy to report that Paul is an excellent traveler. He did great on the plane (just a few minutes of fussing here and there), he can sleep anywhere (just like his daddy), and his charming personality and cute hapa looks won over Japanese people everywhere (they all commented — "he has such big eyes!").

We know that part of why Paul did so well is because of so many prayers on our behalf, and we thank you all for that. I also was surprised at how much of my Japanese language came back to me; I studied in high school and college, but hadn't been to Japan in ten years. The first day in Japan I struggled to string a sentence together, but soon I was conversing with an ease that could only have been the anointing of the Holy Spirit!

While so many aspects of the trip went better than I had expected, there was one struggle that caught me by surprise. I've had seasons of intense anxiety in the past, but recently, through prayer, counseling, and medication, it's felt very much under control. But on this trip, my anxiety flared in a way that I hadn't experienced in a long time. Sometimes I would feel worried and on edge for no reason; other times an innocuous comment from my wife would land on me the wrong way and send me into a spiral of catastrophic thinking.

Thankfully, God provided me with a wonderful wife, and when I confided in her about these struggles, she responded with grace and patience. She reminded me that as believers on a mission for the Lord, we were bound to experience spiritual warfare, and that as the leader of our family, I would be under particular attack. We agreed that anytime I felt under attack, the most important thing was not to feel ashamed or guilty, but to talk about it together and to pray for the Lord's help.

I wish I could say that the anxiety dissipated as soon as we prayed, but it didn't. It persisted, with some ebbs and flows, throughout the trip. But in spite of that, the Lord enabled me to push through the anxious moments and continue with the task at hand: ministering to others. We had divine appointments to pray for a Japanese pastor and his wife, for God to fill them up even as they were pouring out so much in ministry to others; to pray for healing for people who were battling severe depression; to encourage believers who had been through traumatic losses.

Meaghan reminded me that in her experience, sometimes it's in the seasons when she's felt like a total mess that God has given her the greatest opportunities to minister to others. Oftentimes I find myself thinking, "Once I'm on the other side of this struggle, then I'll be a better minister for Christ."

But the Apostle Paul (our son's namesake) wrote to the Corinthians about how he pleaded three times for the Lord to take away the thorn in his flesh. "But he [the Lord] said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness' (II Corinthians 12:9). Perhaps the Lord has used my struggles to instill within me a greater compassion for others and a deeper dependence on Him, and perhaps as I share about this, others will be encouraged to keep on serving Him, even as we are all works still very much in progress.

From Taylor: Japan Summer Mission '23

I am so excited to share with you that I will be leading another short-term mission trip to Japan this summer!

This is my second time leading this trip, and it has been such a blessing and a privilege to take on this role again. Last year was a growing experience for all of us, but God works within and in spite of it all and overall it was such a wonderful experience. We have a whole new team for this year, as we set out to Japan to continue our ministry and partnership with The Neighborhood Student & Ministry Center and TEAMJapan (The Evangelical Alliance Mission). Our team members are Janete Fujiki, Sean Lee, Joelle Lee, Zion Himeno, Reagan Pagaragan and me (Taylor).

Our trip this year will be from **July 28 - August 14**. Our team has two main goals while there:

1) Providing childcare for the missionary children, infants all the way to high school and above, at TEAM Japan's Annual Conference in Karuizawa.

Unfortunately, there have been many situations in which missionary children have not been given the attention and care needed from a loving Christian community. They are put on a pedestal alongside their missionary parents and expected to be as involved in ministry, while they themselves are figuring out their own path of walking with Jesus, building that personal relationship with Him, and needing to be poured into with His love. I am so grateful for this opportunity to invest in and love on these young adults & children.

2) Put on an English VBS for non-Christian Japanese children. We will be partnering with my family & The Neighborhood Student & Ministry Center in Tokyo. We will be sharing Bible stories, playing games, singing songs and doing crafts with the intent to share the Gospel with these precious children and their families.

As a team we are so appreciative of your prayers as we prepare for and embark on this short-term mission!

Everything in its season

For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven: Ecclesiastes 3:1

The heart of man plans his way, but the Lord establishes his steps. Psalm 16:9

It has now been a little over two years since Aunty Gay approached me to take on the role of Executive Director of the Hongo Music Center. During this period, alongside the music center teachers and music ministers at Kalihi Union Church, we have been able to begin piano lessons, facilitate adult choir,

and use music to share God's love to people in various ways such as playing at Sunday worship, weddings, funerals, seasonal events, and other ministries. Additionally, I personally have been able to build so many wonderful relationships not only through church and Christian Vision, but through opportunities such as the Cherry Blossom Festival. Thank you so much for your continued support of me, the Hongos, the Hongo Music Center and of Christian Vision throughout this time.

This season has been such a growing experience, and I am so blessed by my time working to build up the music center. However, it has made me realize that sometimes, a season is just a season. The last couple years have been a time for me to connect with people, and pour into the lives of certain people such as my sister and her family, the Cherry Blossom Girls, my piano students, people at Kalihi Union Church and many others. I am grateful for this time in Hawaii, as I learned how to love people better, and to improve myself and see better how God can use me to build others up. It has been a little over two years since I moved to O'ahu from Japan where I lived with my family as missionaries, and in those two years God has reconfirmed the call on my heart to minister to His people in Japan.

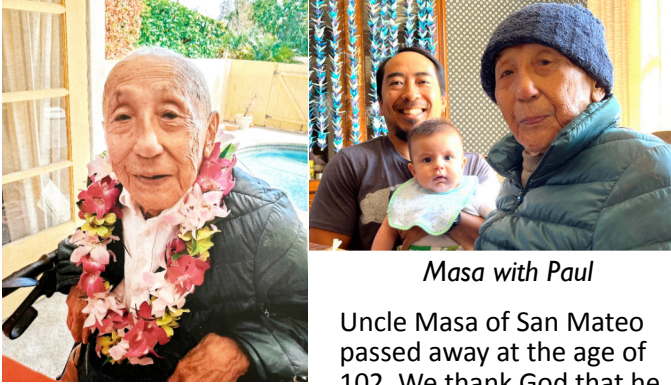
Within the next few months, I will be transitioning out of my role with the Hongo Music Center and going back to Japan later this year as a missionary. While there, I will be working with my family, the Pagaragans, in their ministry, The Neighborhood Student & Ministry Center in Tokyo. Working at The Neighborhood will give me the opportunity to share God's love through music in the form of various classes, worship, and performances and bring a little bit of the Aloha spirit and the Hongo Music Center legacy to Japan. As for the Hongo Music Center here in Hawaii, I believe that we have an answered prayer in the form of Janete Fujiki! Janete joined our HMC team last year as a piano teacher and has exceeded expectations with her joy and eagerness to serve. Janete will be replacing me as Executive Director, and I could not be more excited for her vision and enthusiasm to be incorporated into the Hongo Music Center! Please continue to keep her in your prayers as she takes on this blessing and responsibility.

Thank you again for the privilege to be part of the Christian Vision & Hongo Music Center story. All my love and support,

Taylor Asami Pagaragan

Remembrances

Aloha to Uncle Masanori Hongo



Masa with Paul

Uncle Masa of San Mateo passed away at the age of 102. We thank God that he got to meet Paul before his passing. Paul is the last male Hongo who will carry on the family name.

When we told him Paul's Japanese name was "Torakiyo," he said, "That's my father's name!" Shortly after he sent us a photo of his dad, Torakiyo Hongo. Uncle Masa was a veteran, having served in the Intelligence Unit of the US Army. He received military honors as part of his funeral service and was buried at Punchbowl cemetery.



Paul's Japanese name is from Randy's grandfather, Torakiyo Hongo.

Meiko Nakano



Yuuichiro and Meiko Nakano were pastors of the Japanese Fellowship at San Lorenzo Japanese Christian Church in

California before coming to Hawai'i to pastor the Nichigo Department of Honolulu Christian Church back in the 1980s. Yuuichiro introduced us to mainland and Hawai'i churches of the Holiness denomination. He was then sent out to be an evangelist. He took us to tour Brazil and Japan for his speaking engagements, sharing his ministry time with us.

Meiko learned Christian hula from Debbie Rutkowski and began teaching hula throughout Japan. Many of the hulas were done to the music from our Japanese CDs, "Songs of Praise" and "Songs of Aloha."

Meiko suffered a stroke while in Japan. During her rehabilitation back at her home in Manoa, Randy and I were privileged to visit and sing for her.

After Randy's passing, my next visits with her were with Steve Kaji and Diana Teruya. Meiko went home to be with the Lord while I was in Japan ministering with the hula students she had trained.

Isao "Jack" Tsuji



We met Pat and Jack Tsuji over 35 years ago. Pat was the secretary at Sturge Presbyterian Church where Gerald Chinen was the pastor. Jack was a cardiologist. They lived in Burlingame,

near San Francisco, and hosted us often in their home.

They moved to Modesto, California and invited us to visit and sing at Big Valley Church Prime Time luau and other functions. When Andrew started dating Meaghan, he told us that he was dating a girl from Modesto and asked if we could invite her dad and step-mom to our next concert there. In July 2017, we did meet and had a great time getting to know each other. Little did we know that would be the only time we got to meet before Randy's home going.

A few years ago the Tsujis moved to a retirement community in Laguna Woods in Southern California.

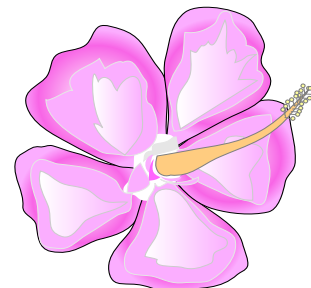
Jack Tsuji was the biggest encourager and supporter of Christian Vision. He taught us so much about grace and strength that can only come from the Lord.

Kennis Furuya



Kennis is the daughter of our dear friends, Kenny and Harriet Furuya. Kennis and her husband, Pastor Greg Bishop, pastored a Spanish-speaking church in Boston where Randy and I ministered eight years ago. More recently they had moved to pastor a church in Chula Vista, California. Andrew, Meaghan and I were privileged to have ministered there in 2021. Kennis suffered a cerebral

hemorrhage and was called to her heavenly home on March 6, 2023 at the age of 51. We will always remember fondly her beautiful smile, her big heart, and her love for the Lord.



Kahala Nui Chapel Service



Paul and Alma Yamashita (back row, right) were our hosts. Also attending were: (front row) Taylor Pagaragan, Jon Leong; (back row) Pastor Brad Chow and his wife, Joyce Torrey (wife of Punahou teacher, the late Bob Torrey), Gay, Helene Sokugawa,

Paul Yamashita was our landlord in Manoa when Andrew started kindergarten at Punahou School, and we needed housing that was nearby. He and his wife, Alma, became lifelong friends, along with their daughter, Alyssa, who is the same age as Andrew. They recently sold their Manoa home and moved into Kahala Nui.

Paul and Alma facilitate the chapel services that are held on Sundays at Kahala Nui. They asked if I could come and sing for them. I said yes, but without Randy I needed a whole team of people from Kalihi Union Church to minister with me. We got a small group of musicians from KUC together and were able to put on a beautiful service on February 12th. The Lord blessed the service and brought many friends to hear me sing.



Left to right: Gay, Jon, Ray Suhl (wife Ellen was at the piano), Marion and Vernon Von, Taylor, Kiyo Itokazu, and hula dancer Helene Sokugawa.

Aloha (Goodbye) to Taylor

I am so grateful to the Lord for providing Taylor to take over my duties for Christian Vision during my transition to retirement. Taylor served faithfully for two years but now feels the Lord is leading her back to Japan. So Christian Vision is expanding our music ministry to Japan as Taylor continues to use her musical gifts for the Lord.

When Taylor came on board, it was a learning experience for me and the Board. Taylor was very patient in explaining that we needed to give her some time for training before plunging her into her role as executive director. One of the things she asked for was to take voice lessons from Cheryl Toma Sanders' performing arts center at Wai'alaie Baptist Church.

Earlier this month I saw her lead the contemporary worship service at Kalihi Union Church. I was so blessed to see how Taylor's voice had gotten much stronger and how she had blossomed into a very confident, anointed worship leader.

I also admire Taylor's diligence in getting her certification in the EFCA Gateway class. I know it took a lot of study and hard work. She felt it was necessary for her spiritual growth so she could better serve in her ministry for Christian Vision and Kalihi Union Church.

Taylor's participation in the Cherry Blossom Festival was also a wonderful opportunity where we all learned and grew from the experience.

Many of us were so blessed to have had the joy of dressing up and attending this cultural event. May God bless you, Taylor, as you continue your ministry in Japan!

Aloha (Welcome) to Janete



Janete was raised in Brazil and received a bachelor's degree in piano from UNESP Sao Paulo State University. In 1985 and 1986, she received a scholarship to attend Aichi Kyoiku Daigaku in Nagoya. As a result, Janete is fluent in Japanese. She is so multi-talented: she dances, can direct choir, and plays piano beautifully. She's one of my best accompanists ever — second only to Randy! She is also an experienced piano teacher. Best of all she has a heart to serve God and a vision for expanding the ministry of the Hongo Music Center. Janete, you are certainly a gift from the Lord to us all.

PHOTO GALLERY



It was such a joy to return to Randy's hometown, Hilo, with Andrew Meaghan, and Paul - Randy's grandson whom he will meet someday in heaven.

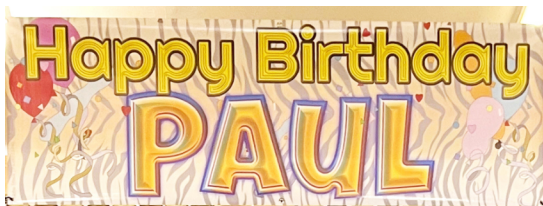
We had one Sunday in Hilo and worshiped at Kaumana Baptist Church, where Ruthie (Randy's sister) has been a faithful member for many years. Pastor Mark Tagami did a dedication for Baby Paul then turned the service over to Andrew and me. It was the first time Meaghan joined us to sing "Never Far From Home." She did a great job singing the mama's part despite having to hold Paul and keeping him from grabbing the mic. I sang Paul's part. Andrew got a bit emotional singing the dad's part - already thinking of the day Paul will grow up and leave home.



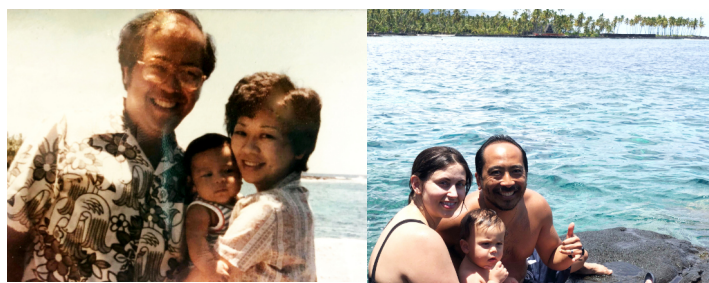
Singing "Never Far From Home" with Paul at Kaumana Drive Baptist Church.



Every three years, the Kelekolio 'ohana gets together for a family reunion. Randy's mother, Ida, was a Kelekolio and 100% Hawaiian. This past February the reunion was in Honaunau on the Big Island. Andrew led the Sunday morning worship service.



Paul Imaikalani Torakiyo Hongo celebrates his 1st Birthday



Randy and Gay took Andrew to Honaunau as a baby, and Andrew and Meaghan took Baby Paul there as well.



The attraction Meaghan most wanted to see in Tokyo was the unique hedgehog cafes, where for a small fee you can have a cup of coffee while playing with cute little hedgehogs.

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Aloha!

Let us know if you would like to transition to e-newsletter by emailing us at **gayhongo47@gmail.com**.

We are grateful for your years of support. Please prayerfully consider the ways you can continue to give.

1. General Fund. This will go toward the operational expenses of the ministry (salaries, technical support, office administration), as well as a pension for me.
2. Hongo Music Center. We have completed raising funds for the building, so further gifts are now being used for programs and scholarships.
3. Missions Fund. This will ensure support for our continuing ministries in Japan and Southeast Asia.

Thank you so much for your support and prayers all through the years. It has been a joy partnering with you to serve our Lord through Christian Vision.

Warmest Aloha,
Gay Hongo