

Views of the Vision

The Ministry of Gay and Andrew Hongo
and Janete Fujiki
July 2024

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From Darkness to Light



Gay presents Betty with her first Bible.

On April 10, 2024, my friend Betty Yee stepped from darkness into light. This was the day I shared the Good News of Jesus Christ with Betty, and she said yes to receiving this free gift of salvation.

Since moving to Modesto, I've become friends with a group of ladies from my church, and we play cards every Sunday afternoon. Betty joins us for cards, although she doesn't attend church with the rest of us



This is my "Modesto Gang" – a group of friends I met through the seniors' group at Big Valley Church. We play cards every week.

One day Betty explained to me why she could not attend church. Betty grew up as the middle child in a family of seven children. Betty's mother was a devout Christian and conducted Sunday School at home every week. When Betty was six, her mother died of complications during a pregnancy.

Betty's mother had a close friend who invited the children to her house church. Betty was fidgety and couldn't sit still during the service, so this woman would lock Betty in a dark storage closet every Sunday. It was a very traumatic experience but somehow

Betty endured the torture. It grew even worse, though, when her little brother grew old enough to attend church with her. The woman would lock both Betty and her little brother in the closet. Of course, he was frightened and cried the entire time. All Betty could do was try to comfort her brother and endure his painful cries. This went on for years.

Betty's father remarried and had three more children. Her stepmother was very cruel, and Betty endured beatings and starvation until she ran away. She learned to fend for herself from a very young age.

Betty eventually had an arranged marriage and, unfortunately, the man she married was mentally ill and later diagnosed with schizophrenia. The couple had three children, and somehow Betty managed to endure her husband's fits of rage and violence, even as she worked to support the family.

Betty is an amazing person. She supported her family as a hair dresser as well as many other occupations. She is self taught and is an amazing seamstress. She was the grand prize winner of "The Greatest Sewing Competition on Earth" held at the LA Convention Center. She won \$30K and an all expense paid trip for two to four European countries. Betty is a talented musician. I met her many years ago through my good friend Pat Tsuji who played with her in the Modesto Ukulele Group. Betty now plays bass in several organizations.

Betty told me that she could not step foot into a church because memories of being locked in a closet would flood her mind, and she would get panic attacks. I told Betty she doesn't have to go to church to become a Christian. All she had to do was repent of her sins and accept the gift of salvation through Jesus Christ who died on the cross to pay for our sins. Betty said, "I don't sin. I try to be a good person so I can go to heaven." I told Betty that I thought the same thing. I didn't like being called a sinner because I felt I didn't sin. But I learned that we are all sinners, we all fall short of the glory of God, we all make selfish mistakes and fall short of loving others as we should. And we cannot earn our way to heaven by doing good. The only way to heaven is through the shed blood of Jesus Christ. But we have to receive this gift. It is free. I think the fact that it was free caught her attention because she is Chinese.

One afternoon, when it was just the two of us, I felt led to ask Betty if she would like to pray to receive Jesus Christ as her personal Lord and Savior. She said yes! I prayed for her and told her, "You were spiritually dead but now you are spiritually alive because the Holy Spirit dwells in you."

Please pray for Betty because she still carries a lot of anger and bitterness for the suffering she endured throughout her life. Pray that she will come to know God as a kind and loving God, full of grace and mercy. She is moving in the right direction, having gone from darkness into light. As I Peter 2:9 says, "You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light."

200th Anniversary of Haili Congregational Church Hilo, Hawai'i (1824 – 2024)



Gay directs the Haili "Youth" Choir.

On May 19, 2024 I was privileged to participate in the 200th Anniversary Celebration of Haili Congregational Church, directing the "youth choir" Randy and I started decades ago as they sang 10,000 Reasons. Randy served as minister of youth and music at the historic Hawaiian church in the early 1970s, and ever since then, Haili has faithfully supported us as their missionaries. We have returned many times and have had reunions with our youth choir. Although our youth are now in their 60s and 70s, they still call us the Haili Youth Choir! You can see video clips of the service on our website, www.rghongo.com.



Haili Church Choir Trip to Hana, Maui in 1973.

Here is an excerpt from the church's website, explaining the spiritual and historical significance of the church:

"The working of God can be documented in the early history of Haili Congregational Church. First, God used the zeal of Henry Opukahaia, the first Hawaiian convert to Christianity, to inspire New England missionaries to bring the Gospel of Jesus Christ to his native land. Secondly, six months prior to the arrival of the first missionaries at Kailua-Kona King Kamehameha II (Liholiho) broke the kapu system of pagan worship. Thirdly, with the spiritual vacuum created by the loss of the kapu system, the response to the Gospel was tremendous on the eastern side of the Big Island, especially through the preaching of Rev. Titus Coan, one of the missionaries of the early Hilo Mission. The church grew to over 10,000 members with 1,705 Hawaiians baptized on one day alone, perhaps the largest church in the world at that time."

God blessed me so much through this anniversary celebration, as He reminded me of all the ways He used Randy and me to minister to others. Shortly before the beginning of the celebration, one of our youth choir members, Debbie Lee, called me to say that unfortunately, she wouldn't be able to attend the festivities. (Debbie Lee is a descendent of Henry Opukahaia's first cousin) She was in the hospital, just having had bypass surgery for her heart. But even in that condition, she called me and said, "I'm so sad I'm not able to attend the anniversary because I really wanted to sing in your youth choir. But even more importantly, I want to tell you how much I appreciate you and Randy. If it weren't for you guys, where would we be today?"

My heart was warmed by her words, and it was one of those wonderful moments when the Lord lets us have a glimpse of the fruits of our labors, even decades later. All glory be to God for, as I Corinthians 3:7 says, "So neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow."



Miles Matsumura, Dana Lee Blair, Gay, Cynthia Kaapu Lyons, Karen Fronda Halemanu, Ruth Hongo Binyan, and Liz LeeLy Masaoka.

Report from Janete Fujiki Tribute to Dottie Yuen



Dottie Yuen (third row, wearing the leis) directed the Na Leo Choir for 22 years.

Dottie Yuen was a member of the Kalihi Union Church choir back in the '50s when Dr. Carbough (of Moody Bible Institute) was the director. After Dr. Carbough's departure, Ada Lum stepped in. One of Ada's famous quotes was, "I wasn't the best, but I was the best they had." Since then, whenever there was no one to direct the choir, Dottie would step in to help.

I (Janete) am now directing the adult choir, which ministers at Christmas and Easter. I am assisted by John Kim and Lisa Lee. Theresa Shelby also helps from time to time.



Janete Fujiki directing the Easter choir.

Years ago, when there was a need for a children's choir, Dottie was there, and "Na Leo O Kalihi" (translated "the voices of Kalihi") was born and endured for 22 years. Some of the alumni of this choir were Danny and Jamie Yamashiro, Sheri Hirai Kobata, Chris Ali'ipule (Vice President of Christian Vision Board of Directors), Stephanie Kawamura Tamaoka, Lisa Omoto, and many others. Randy and Andrew were privileged to be featured in some of their productions.

For many years, there was no children's choir; but now I am doing my best to revive this important ministry, assisted by U'ilani Ciacci and Patricia Steeper.

Many years ago, someone donated a beautiful set of handbells which lay dormant for years until Dottie was led to renew this ministry. She faithfully directed the handbell choir for 22 years until she retired. After Dottie's retirement, the handbells were again put to rest. I have now revived the handbell choir with twelve ringers, led by April Ikeda assisted by Cindy Fujiwara. I also started an ukulele ensemble. At first Chester Centino was director; however he had to step down due to demands of fatherhood. The Lord provided other leaders in Sharon Darapiza and Val Butler.

Thank you, Bobby and Dottie Yuen, for the wealth of music that ministered to so many during your many years of service to the Lord at KUC.

Kanikapila #2 at Tsujis



“Kanikapila” is the Hawaiian word for “jam session.” It’s when a bunch of family and friends get together with their guitars and ukuleles and sing Hawaiian songs late into the night – and often someone will jump up and start dancing hula.

Our first session, which I call Kanikapila #1, took place in November 2021 at the home of our good friends, Jack and Pat Tsuji, in Laguna Woods, California. Our second session took place a few months ago, in March 2024, again at Pat’s home, but sadly, this time without her husband, Jack, as he had passed just seven months prior.

At Kanikapila #2 we were blessed with the presence of Pat’s hula teacher, Linda Merritt, who shared her beautiful hula with us. Friends Kenny and Harriet Furuya were also there to play ukulele and sing with me. Sylvia Yamamoto, my friend from Modesto, had made the trip to Southern California with me as my traveling companion. Sylvia is Filipino so she taught us to sing “Dahil Sayo.”



Left to right: Kenny Furuya, Pat Tsuji, Sylvia Yamamoto, Harriet Furuya, and Gay.

The jam session wasn’t just about music, though. It was also an opportunity for the Lord to bring healing to us. As we sang, we saw the beautiful photos Jack had taken throughout the years, adorning the walls of his home. We remembered his love of photography and traveling, and his love for the Lord. That day was also the one-year anniversary of the celebration of life service for the Furuyas’ daughter, Kennis. Strengthened by God’s grace, Harriet led us in singing “It is Well With my Soul” in Kennis’ honor. Even with grieving hearts, God gave us much joy in singing and enjoying our fellowship. We look forward to Kanikapila #3.

Japan outreach by Taylor Pagaragan



Young adults at Cherry Blossom festival

Dear friends,

Can you believe we’re halfway through the year already? Time has been flying by, but I’m excited to share all the things God has been doing here at my ministry at The Neighborhood Student and Ministry Center in Tokyo!

PRAISE REPORT: One of our close friends raised his hand to accept Jesus as his savior at church on April 21! We met this friend 10+ years ago when he came to America for a 2-week homestay in junior high. He has come with us to church many, many times as well as participated in our family Bible studies. Despite that, he has never felt ready to accept Jesus until now. We are so excited to continue encouraging him on his journey with the Lord.

The Neighborhood has been staying busy with homestay at least once a month, as well as English events 1-2 times a month as well. In the last six months, we have had over 20 students (including about 10 moms), not only stay at our house, but come with us to church! Several of these families have even come to church on their own since then!

I am currently attending New Hope Tokyo and I have been blessed to serve on the worship team for main service, as well as on the worship team and translation team at our young adults’ service. We have a good mix of professionals and complete newbies, and I am so encouraged by each person’s servant heart and spirit. I have also recently been asked by our pastor to start discipling the young women at our church. I especially ask for your prayers for wisdom and boldness in speaking God’s truth and love into the lives of these precious ladies.

I will be visiting Hawaii and the mainland this summer to meet with supporters and visit with family. If you are interested in learning more about my ministry or visiting The Neighborhood, please feel free to reach out at: taylorasami.p@gmail.com.

You can also donate online at www.rghongo.com

Gratefully Yours,

Taylor Asami Pagaragan

Reflections from Andrew



“Nalu! Nalu!” shouted my son as wave after wave broke at his feet, his waist, even his chest. The ocean was shimmering under a clear Hawaiian sun, and Paul held my hand tightly as we waded into the water. He had that smile kids have – so present to the moment, so full of wonder – as if this La’ie beach was the most amazing thing he’d ever experienced in his life. And in a way, it was.

Paul had just turned two years old and was at that age when he parroted most every phrase he heard – and so when I’d taught him the Hawaiian word for wave, “nalu,” he’d picked it up right away. “Nalu! Nalu!” I shouted back, when an unexpectedly large wave hit Paul square in the face. I couldn’t help but laugh when I saw him sputter ocean water and squint his eyes in a look of surprise (“Such a dad thing to do,” my wife would probably say, rolling her eyes); and I also felt a bit of fatherly pride when he, still standing, tugged my hand, urging me to go with him deeper and further into the water with him. My kid loved the ocean; that was the Hawaiian in him.

We were visiting Hawai’i for a week from Northern California, where my wife, Paul and I lived, to see friends and family, enjoy the beach, and teach our son about the islands where I had grown up... the islands where my dad had taken me swimming when I was a little boy, too. When we’d driven out to the North Shore from the Honolulu airport, we’d passed Turtle Bay – a resort I remembered from childhood. “My parents took me there for weekend vacations,” I told my wife as we drove past the sign on the side of the road. “I loved swimming in their pool with my dad.”

I think part of why I loved the pool so much was because it had these cool fountains in each corner of the pool, with water cascading down. And I also loved it because I just loved swimming with my dad. He would help me to practice holding my breath underwater, and then later, as I got more comfortable in the water, race me from one side of the pool to the other.

I’d gotten used to winning those races, my dad being the type of dad who’d always “give chance” to let me take the lead. Until one day, when I was maybe 10 or 11, and after another of my swimming victories, he said, “Actually, son, I didn’t let you win that one. You won.”

Now that I have a boy of my own, I love swimming with him, too. I love putting him on my shoulders and jumping up and down in the water. I love throwing him up above my head, catching him in the ocean spray, then hearing him say, “Again, Daddy!” I love balancing him on a boogie board, and, as each passing wave lifts him heavenward, shouting together, “Nalu!”

We don’t live in Hawai’i anymore, and my dad’s no longer here on earth anymore, either. It’s a grief I will carry all my days that my dad never got to meet my son; he had passed by the time Paul was born. But my dad taught me so many things – not just to swim, but to be proud to be from these beautiful islands, to be proud that we were Hawaiian, to love this land and ocean that our people came from. And I feel, when I teach Paul to brave and respect the ocean and to call the waves by the words our Hawaiian ancestors did, as if I’m somehow carrying on my dad’s legacy. Honoring him.

Paul and I swam deeper into the ocean, so deep that Paul couldn’t touch the bottom anymore, though I could. He wrapped his little arms wrapped around my neck, and I held him tight to my chest. Together we rose and fell with each wave that made its way to the shore, and I thought of something else my dad taught me, something I want to pass on to my son more than anything else: that this ocean was created by a God of power, might, and boundless love, and that as deep and wide as this sea is, it is but the tiniest hint of how deep and wide His love for us is.

I miss my dad. I wish he could be here to see the father and husband I have become. I wish I could sit with him on a beach and tell him, “I didn’t know what it was like to be a father before, but now I am one. Now I understand. And I’m even more grateful now, beyond words, for the father you were to me.” But that imagined conversation eludes me now, and will all my days.

But the Good News of Jesus Christ tells us that this life is not the end. Because of Jesus’ crucifixion and resurrection, because of His shed blood for our forgiveness, for those of us who receive Him, death is merely a turning. When we bade farewell to my dad on December 16, 2017, it was not “good-bye,” but merely “a hui hou,” as Hawaiians say. “Until we meet again.”

I kissed my son’s cheek in the cool, salty water, knowing that far beyond this endless expanse of sea, on a day hopefully many, many years from now, both Paul and I will someday pass from this world. On the other side, we will finally see Jesus, the giver of every good gift, face to face. And at his side will be my dad, standing with his arms open wide, eager to embrace me, waiting with breathless anticipation to finally, after so many long years, meet his grandson.



First Chinese Church of Christ Celebrates 145th Anniversary



On January 21, Gay ministered at First Chinese Church of Christ: Janete, Chenchen, Gay, Cynthia & Nathan Chung

First Chinese Church of Christ in Honolulu was founded in 1879 and is mother church to UCC Judd, United Community Church in Hilo, and grandmother church to Community Church of Honolulu. The women's missions committee (known as Poo Tet Fui) would host an annual missions fair, and proceeds from the event would be given to their missionaries. Christian Vision is grateful to FCCC for supporting us as one of their missionaries for over 25 years.

On January 21, I (Gay) ministered at FCCC taking, Janete Fujiki to accompany me on the piano.

I also asked Chenchen Zhao to help translate and accompany me on the guzhen (chinese zither). Chenchen is from China and is studying at UH to obtain her doctorate in nutritional science. The 8:30am service is in Mandarin, so Chenchen translated as I shared about my ministry with Christian Vision. She coached me on my pronunciation as I learned to sing the chorus of "How Great Thou Art" in Mandarin.

The highlight in the 10:30am English service was when I shared a video with them. The video featured one of their own, Daryl Hee, who had grown up at First Chinese. Daryl expressed his gratitude to the church for nurturing him through his younger days. Through the love of God that had been poured into him, he went into the ministry. He is now serving as assistant pastor and worship pastor at Legacy Church in Kailua. Daryl took over his dad's Kalihi Print Shop and has been a big help to Christian Vision. He does the layout and printing of this newsletter. Now in his fifties, Daryl took the bold step of pursuing a degree in Biblical studies. Christian Vision was led by the Lord to support Daryl with part of his tuition. Daryl gives all glory to God and wants to use his knowledge of the bible to teach and serve others.

Russell Mun is another dear friend from FCCC. Recently, Russell's beloved wife, Lynette, went home to be with the Lord after battling cancer. A few months later he suffered a stroke and lost his vision. He is now living in San Mateo (a little over an hour from Modesto) with his daughter Laurie, who was Andrew's classmate from Punahou. One Saturday, Andrew and Laurie had their families get together, and I was able to tag along and catch up with Russell. We talked about God's faithfulness in the midst of hardships, and we also sang some Hawaiian songs and hymns for him. So when I went to First Chinese to share, I was able to tell the congregation about how Russell is continuing to trust in the Lord, and Russell was able to watch the livestream of the service from California.

From 1st Soprano to 2nd Alto

On April 18, I went to a doctor to examine my vocal cords. I was concerned because after a case of laryngitis three months earlier, I was still hoarse, my voice was raspy, and I couldn't sing. The doctor put a camera through my nostrils, asked me to inhale, exhale, then sing "eeeeee." After the exam, he said the good news is that I have no nodules or signs of anything that should be of concern. The bad news is that my vocal cords have relaxed to the point that they are no longer touching, and there is a space between them now. That's what caused the change in my voice. It's a result of AGING, and the doctor said there's nothing he can do about it and unfortunately, it's not going to improve.

Although I was devastated at first, the Lord reminded me that my voice is His, not mine. The Lord blessed me with many years of using my voice for His glory. He allowed me to record many albums which captured my voice when I was at my peak. I am grateful for singing at many events and churches and even a last mission trip to Japan before this happened. I can still eke out a melody and sing now and then, but my days of ministering as a soloist are definitely over. I am grateful that I can still lead worship and take teams to minister in nursing homes. I jokingly told Andrew that I will embark on a new career as a comedian.



PHOTO GALLERY



Left to right: Carole Takushi, Jenny Urbano, Al Kawazoe, Gay, Jon Leong and Vernon Von sing Christmas carols at the Plaza at Moanalua. Not pictured: Charlotte Kawazoe and Urbano family.



Ed and Jane Shiroma, Gay, Millie Kataoka (100 years old), and Jane Nakasato.



Janete finds joy in participating in KUC dance ministry led by Sepe Ochoa



April Ikeda directing the handbell choir.



On April 16th we had our first seminar on Health, Nutrition and Fitness with Chenchen Zhao and Winton Fong (Janete Fujiki's son)



Chenchen accompanies Gay on the guzhen (Chinese zither)



Children's Choir with U'ilani (left) and Janete (right).



Christian Vision Board of Directors

Front Row, Left to Right: Wayne Yasutomi, Janete Fujiki, Kathleen Tauga, Gay, Nelson Kanemoto

Back Row, Left to Right: Gordon Lau, Steve Kaji, Chris Ali'ipule, Bob Kishi

(Missing Daniel Miyamoto)

We bid Mahalo and Aloha to long-time board members Gordon, Wayne, and Bob.

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Paul celebrates his 2nd birthday in La'ie, Hawai'i...and he's expecting a baby sister in October!

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. Japan Outreach by Taylor Pagaragan.

You can also donate online at **www.rghongo.com**.

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