



CHRISTMAS FOR EVERYBODY

Christmas can splinter into a hundred themes—
Celebration of mothers or babies or even barn animals.
Christmas trees, Santa Claus, Christmas presents, red nose reindeer....
But serious theologians capture Christmas in the one word, **In-carn-ation**.
“Carne” means meat as in Chili-con-carne.
God coming down into the body (carne) of Jesus.

For most commoners, Jesus is the Superman of religion.
Faster than a speeding bullet, hoping over tall buildings in one bound.
Everybody focusing on a spiritual Superman?

For us seniors, who weathered through 80 Christmases,
We need more than Superman Jesus.
Cancer, open heart surgery, life partner departed.

Incarnation in me is the Christmas I need.
God within me; God within you; God within everybody!

EMMANUEL, GOD WITH US.
(1 Corinthians 6:19)

Martyr Oscar Romero said it best:

“Maybe the Christ event, as we know it,
was simply the fullest manifestation
of the presence of God
already in everyone,
everything,
everywhere.”

Oscar Romero, Archbishop of San Salvador, assassinated March 24, 1980, vocal critic of the violence of government armed forces, right-wing groups, and leftist guerrillas involved in El Salvador’s civil conflict. His outspoken defense of the poor brought repeated threats to his life.



OUTSIDERS

I preached in a Muslim Mosque some ten years ago. The Imam was my good friend. It was **Iftar** in the middle of Ramadan, the month of fasting. It is the custom of many Los Angeles mosques to invite those of other religions to an evening of worship, feasting, and friendly conversation during Ramadan. There were about 10 people of other religions attending and 3 speaking this evening. This Iftar is a focus on Abraham, who is the father of three religions—Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. So interfaith conversation was welcome.

I preached from Romans Chapter 4, which said that Abraham was the model of true Christian faith. I could not read that chapter without jumping up and down for joy—because I was Japanese. I gave 27 years of my life as a Christian theology professor in a Japanese university, advocating for Jesus to nominal Buddhist and Shinto students. (In preparation I had spent a year in language school and 10 years in seminary graduate theological studies in Tokyo and Louisville). None of the other missionaries reacted as I did to Romans Chapter 4 because they were Caucasian missionaries.

In Japan less than 1% of Japanese (0.8%) are baptized Christians. 1% going up; 99% going down and they called that **Good News**. Any sane Christian would say that is **BAD NEWS**. Karl Barth wrote that when the Good News becomes Bad News, the interpreters have made a mistake somewhere. Some believe that only Christians go to heaven; all Buddhists go to hell.

What made me jump up and down? It was because Abraham, the model of true Christian faith was **not a Christian!!!** Abraham lived and died before Jesus was born. It was impossible for Abraham to believe in Jesus. If Abraham who was not a Christian is the model of true Christian faith, then non-Christian Japanese can be welcomed by the God of Jesus even if rejected by the institutional Christian church. What do you think?

Rev. Dickson Kazuo Yagi

THE FAITH OF ABRAHAM, JESUS, AND EVERYBODY

Romans 4:13 *"For the promise that he would inherit the world did not come to Abraham or to his descendants through the law but through the righteousness of faith."*

Note 1: "Law" means the requirements of Judaism, the religion of the Jews, which is our Old Testament.

Note 2: Although Abraham could not believe in Jesus because he died before Jesus was born, he did believe in God who led him to leave his home in Haran to follow God to Canaan, a foreign country.

Note 3: Paul, who wrote the Letter to Romans in the New Testament, expanded early Christianity from the small community of Jews (only Jews were Christians) to open the door to all races (Gentiles means all races—even Japanese).

Note 4: Although Abraham did not know Jesus, Abraham followed God from Haran to Canaan. And this God is the God of Jesus Christ. That is how Abraham is tied to Jesus Christ.

Note 5: So Jitchan (my grandfather, Seiryu Yagi) did not know Jesus because Jitchan was born in Okinawa. But Jitchan followed God in moving from Okinawa to Hawaii in 1907. So Jitchan followed God to a foreign country just like Abraham followed God. So I believe that Jitchan is tied to Jesus in the same way that Abraham was tied to Jesus—by following the God of Jesus.

Note 6: People today might not believe in Jesus because their families or nation might believe in a different religion. But God speaks to everybody in our hearts, our conscience. When we obey our conscience, we are following the God of Jesus Christ.

Note 7: So even Japanese Buddhists and Iraq Muslims are tied to Jesus and to the God of Jesus whenever they obey their conscience. The voice of conscience is the voice of God. (See Romans 2:15; 9:1) That is how all Japanese in Japan are tied to Jesus. And that is why I jump up and down with joy when Abraham who was not a Christian is called the model of true faith.

Note 8: I am thrilled that Japanese are unconsciously tied to Jesus by following conscience. I am thrilled because I am Japanese. Those **who are not Japanese** might become angry that some Japanese Buddhists might sneak into the Christian heaven by following conscience. Christians **who are not Jews** may become angry when Paul says, “And so all Israel (Jews) will be saved,” Romans 11:26. Jews and Japanese; Paul and I are **OUTSIDERS** because our people are not Christians.

Do you think that God will torture 99% of the Japan population in hell? This is what the institutional Church believed in the past. But listen to what Paul wrote in Romans. God spoke to Jews through their Bible (Torah). But for those who were not Jews (Japanese), God spoke to them through their **conscience**. That is why I jumped up and down with joy when Paul said that Abraham, who was not a Christian, was the model of true Christian faith.

“When Gentiles, who do not possess the law (Old Testament), do instinctively what the law requires, these, though not having the law, are a law to themselves. They show that what the law requires is written on their hearts, to which their own conscience also bears witness....” Romans 2:14-16.

What do you think?

Dickson Kazuo Yagi (屋宜和夫) is from Hilo, Hawaii. He graduated from George Washington University (D.C.'59), Tokyo Union Seminary (B.A., Th.M.'65) and So. Baptist Seminary (Th.M., Ph.D., Louisville, '72). At U. of Hawaii he did post-graduate studies in Buddhism under David Kalupahana, David Chappell, and Alfred Bloom.

Dickson taught Christian Theology for 27 years at Seinan Gakuin University in Fukuoka, Japan, where he is Professor Emeritus of Christian Studies. He also taught Intro. to World Religions, Christian Ethics, Bible, and a seminar in Buddhist-Christian Studies. He was Head Chaplain of the university, one term. Until retirement he was a member of Tōzai Shūkyō Kōryū Gakkai, one of the highest levels of Buddhist-Christian Dialogue in Japan. Rev. Yagi is a retired minister at Sage Granada Park United Methodist Church in Alhambra, CA. He is retired at Pilgrim Place, Claremont, CA, where he is Chair of the Religions Committee. He can be reached at dkyagi@icloud.com



RELIGIONS: PATHS UP THE SAME MOUNTAIN?

Dr. William Malcomson (May 20, 2019)

One of the questions that is often asked of those of us who study world religions is "Aren't all religions basically the same? Aren't they all paths to the same summit?"

My view is that the answer to this question is, as is the answer to most significant questions, Yes and No.

1. Yes

All religions assume that there is something beyond what can be experienced by the 5 senses. And that humans can contact this something, be it a Force, Energy, Mystery, Divinity, etc.

Many of the world's religions had their origins in what is often called the Fertile Crescent, modern Iran and Iraq. The Aryans came from there into India. Abraham traditionally came from there into what we know as Israel.

There have always been interactions between people of different histories and cultures. From the Hebrews came Judaism, from Judaism came Christianity, from both of them came Islam. However, Babylonian religions affected the Hebrews, many people of many cultures came through Palestine on their way to Africa, and vice-versa, affecting the peoples who became Christians. Christians and Jews interacted with Greek and Roman religions. Trading brought Europeans to Asia, Africa, North America, South America. All religions evolve through interaction with alternatives. In fact, no one religion is a single entity. There are many forms of Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, etc. There is no "pure" religious tradition.

Humans the world over have in common their concerns about their lives. We all ask the same basic questions: How can we survive in the world as it is? Why do we exist? How do we find meaning and purpose in our lives? Can we exercise control over our present and future? Why do we die? Is there life after death? What can be known and what is unknowable? And on and on and on. Religions are not the same, but we do participate in a common humanity.

2. No

We come from separate histories. We were not all born in the same location. I was initially Christian because I was born into a family that thought of itself as Christian. We may all have the same questions, but we do not all have the same histories. We do not have the same histories within the religious tradition which we confess. I do not have the same history as a Palestinian Christian, an Indian Christian, or even as a particular Christian family next door.

Many people believe that there is a Divine Being of some kind with whom they can interact. But if you were to ask people even within the same religious tradition to describe this Divine Being, there would often be amazingly little commonality. Many people in religious traditions do not believe in a Divine Being. A lot of us are what are called "non-theists." And, of course, there are religious traditions which affirm the existence of a number of divinities. There are religious people who are Pantheists, Panentheists, and those who aren't concerned about the issue at all.

Some religious traditions find meaning in ways which enhance their lives. They are into fulfillment, having life abundantly, expanding horizons. And there are traditions which find meaning in emptying ourselves of desire, craving, achievement. There are also traditions which try to find a balance between fulfillment and emptying.

There are religious traditions which emphasize dualities: Good and Evil, Creator and Created, Secular and Religious, Known and Unknown. There are religious traditions which emphasize Oneness or non-duality: All life is one, All are divine, No evil--just ignorance. In philosophy, there is the difference between Dualism and Monism. An emphasis on Duality can often lead to Exclusivity (there is one way to truth). An emphasis on non-duality can lead to Inclusivity (there is no one truth).

Are all religions paths to the same summit? Is there so much difference within each religious tradition that there are an infinite number of paths even within that tradition? Perhaps we should focus more on what we humans have in common than our differences. BUT we also need to affirm how individual we are and celebrate our individuality.

We are not our religions, we are Fred and Mary, Jack and Diane. *Bill Malcomson*

Dr. William Malcomson is retired in Washington State. He was Dean of the American Baptist Seminary of the West, a founder of the School of Theology and Ministry of Seattle University, former President of the Council for Pacific Asian Theology, and former Theologian-in-Residence at Seattle First Baptist Church. He is blessed with two sons, one of whom is a Christian Buddhist, one daughter, and 5 grandchildren. Bill has a Ph.D. from Princeton in World Religions. **He recently suffered a stroke, 2/05/20.** We rejoice in his survival. We pray for his full recovery and his further ministry among us. The source of his wisdom is not religious logic, but experience—the joys and tears of the briar patch of life that is our real life journey. Many of us are his secret disciples.

DR Yagi

FAITH HEALING?

Dickson K. Yagi

I was supposed to have died in 2000, 20 years ago. I had radical Prostatectomy, radiation, and hormone therapy. The Japan urologist said he could keep any prostate cancer patient alive with hormone therapy for 2 years. My 2 years were up in the year 2000. Ellen was giving talks as a Japan missionary in Honolulu Baptist churches. She spoke of how I would die in the year 2000; and how she was holding me with open hands. I took early retirement from the Japan Baptist Mission, from Seinan Gakuin University in Fukuoka, and finally from the Baptist International Mission Board.

Then my Aunt Kimie Yagi called a special prayer meeting of Yagi Christians. In our extended family, she has the most positive faith. She always rises to the top as a leader in whatever church she joins. We met in one of the homes—about 6 or 8 believers. She said, “What is our faith for, if not to pray for Kazu’s miraculous healing.”

They all prayed earnestly, some with their hands on my head. But I didn’t take it seriously because I really didn’t care one way or the other. I was honed sharp for evangelism with Buddhist students in Japanese universities—12 years of graduate theological studies in Tokyo and Louisville. Now I was suddenly retired from Japan and university students. What good was all my preparations in theology, language, and interreligious dialogue? I had little contact with Hawaii Buddhists. I had ended my life in Japan. I had no role in Hawaii. I was depressed for several years. I may as well be dead. But I deeply appreciated each relative stretching their faith to pray for me.

Just two or three days ago I suddenly remembered that prayer meeting 20 years ago. For the first time I thought, “By golly, all those prayers really worked.” “I’ll be hanged!” And my expected care-giver, Ellen, died 10 years ago. But I am still alive and kicking. Auntie Kimie who called the prayer meeting died about 12 years ago. And Buddhists in Los Angeles are so appreciative of my concerns. Many Buddhist priests have become my dear friends. I was even invited to give 3 lectures on Amida Buddha and Jesus Christ in a Buddhist temple. I am Chair of the Nikkei Interfaith Fellowship—a monthly luncheon fellowship for ministers and friends of all Japanese religions. What a fulfilling way to enjoy my senior years. Twenty years on borrowed time! **Do I believe in faith healing?** I don’t know; I wonder!

JACL APOLOGIZES TO TULE LAKE INCARCEREES

By Yukio Kawaratani



The new generation of JACL leaders and members should be congratulated for acknowledging and understanding the need for voting in favor of the resolution offering a sincere apology to Tule Lake incarcerated. The National Council of the JACL took the action on August 3, 2019, at their national convention in Salt Lake City, Utah.

In adopting the apology resolution, the National Council of the JACL resolved that in the spirit of reconciliation, forgiveness, and community unity, a sincere apology is offered to those imprisoned in the Tule Lake Segregation Center for non-violent acts of resistance and dissent, who suffered shame and stigma during and after the war due to the JACL's attitudes and treatment towards individuals unfairly labeled "disloyal".

The JACL National Council also resolved that all chapters understand the issues of imprisonment, mistreatment and resistance of Tule Lake resisters; to update the JACL Curriculum Guide and teaching materials; and to recognize Tule Lake resisters at an appropriate public ceremony during the 2020-2021 biennial. Past attempts of apology resolutions were blocked by past JACL leaders and Nisei veterans who long maintained animosity towards Tule Lake resisters, for physical attacks by extremists against JACL leaders, and exemption from the draft, while Nisei veterans made major sacrifices.

These issues were brought up again by a minority of JACL delegates in opposition, but many delegates spoke in favor of the resolution and it was overwhelmingly passed. The co-sponsors of the resolution were the Pacific Northwest District Council and the Northern California-Western Nevada-Pacific District Council. The key leaders of the committee effectively shepherding the resolution were National JACL Board Member Haruka Roudenbush and Stan Shikuma of the Seattle chapter.

This is a historic moment in the history between the JACL and Tule Lake resisters, that extends back 76 years. In 1943, the War Relocation Authority, with the concurrence of the JACL, administered and summarily sent all persons who resisted the "loyalty questionnaire" in any way – i.e. refusing to answer, answering in the negative, answering with a qualified yes – to the Tule Lake Segregation Center that was converted into a high security prison. Tule Lake resisters totaled 12,000 inmates and the majority were innocent women and children victims.

Unlike in other camps where security was lax, they were treated like enemy alien prisoners and under the threat of imminent prisoner exchanges and deportation to Japan after the war. Even after the war, the JACL with their super patriotism position, long denigrated Tule Lake resisters. As a result, Tule Lake resisters were stigmatized and slurred as the "No-Nos" by the Japanese American community to this day.

Tule Lake resisters, family and descendants can take comfort from this recognition and apology by the JACL. This apology was long past due, as 76 years of stigmatizing has been hurtful and wrong. We are thankful to the new generation of JACL leaders and members, to try to stop the stigmatizing, admit past wrongs and divisions, and hopefully achieve reconciliation and unity to the Japanese American community. Then this can be considered a victory for Tule Lake Resisters and the JACL. (Published in *Rafu Shimpo*, Jan.18, 2019)

Yukio Kawaratani, a Tule Lake inmate and long-time JACL member.



Pondering the Birth/Death of Jesus, the Slave

Dr. Leroy Seat

During the Christmas season, we sing/hear many hymns/carols. In the New Testament, though, there are few hymns. Philippians 2:6~11 is most likely one of those hymns, and there Jesus is referred to as a ***doulos***, the Greek word for *slave*.

“The Christ Hymn”

The words of Philippians 2:6~11 are often called “the Christ Hymn,” and they are a significant summary of the nature of Jesus Christ’s existence. Verses 6~8 emphasize Jesus’ humiliation and verses 9~11 highlight his exaltation.

Even though most English versions of the Bible translate the word *doulos* (in v. 7) as *servant*, its primary meaning is *slave*. And Jesus, the slave, ends up being crucified, which according to Black theologian James Cone is the equivalent of slaves and, later, their descendants during the Jim Crow years being lynched.

Those of us who grew up in evangelical churches, and those who are evangelicals today, see the first three verses mainly as linked to Jesus’ death on the cross as the means of providing atonement for sinful human beings. Be that as it may, Jesus was crucified as a common criminal by the usual Roman means of capital punishment. Moreover, the Jews of Jesus’ day knew that the Hebrew Bible states that “anyone hung on a tree is under God’s curse” (Deuteronomy 21:23).

The last half of “the Christ hymn” emphasizes the inexplicable exaltation of the crucified Jesus. Certainly, both Jesus’ humiliation and his exaltation must be recognized and affirmed. Most of us, though, perhaps fail to grasp the full impact of the ignominy of Jesus’ being “lynched” as a dissident slave.

“The Gospel according to Mary Brown”

In July, a youngish blogger in California posted a long and [thought-provoking blog](#) article titled “The Cross and The Lynching Tree by Dr. James Cone.”

On pages 6-7 of his post, the blogger introduces W.E.B. Du Bois’s “The Gospel According to Mary Brown” and provides [this link](#) to the “Xmas 1919” issue of *The Crisis* magazine with, scrolling down, to Du Bois’s brief three-page story.

Du Bois co-founded the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People in 1909 and long served as the founding editor of *The Crisis*, the official publication of the NAACP.** In that 101-years-ago issue of *The Crisis*, Du Bois took the conventional Jesus story and brought it to his Black readers living in the Jim Crow South. He replaced Jesus with Joshua, a black baby born to a single mother (Mary Brown) sharecropping in the rural South.

That re-telling of the narrative about Jesus was consistent with a central point Du Bois had made in his *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903) and other essays. He condemned “white religion” as an “utter failure.”

As Cone points out in his book mentioned above, for Du Bois, true Christianity is defined by “the life and teaching of Jesus of Nazareth and the Golden Rule.” But, Du Bois emphasized, “the white church’s treatment of blacks was “sadly at variance with this doctrine” (Cone, pp. 103-4).

As we celebrate Christmas this year—in ways far different from usual because of the covid-19 pandemic—let's celebrate not only the birth of Jesus as the Savior but also the one who came “to liberate the oppressed” (Luke 4:18, CEB).

In Du Bois's story of Joshua, “the White Folk” were offended by what he said. They complained, “What do you mean by this talk about all being brothers—do you mean social equality?” And they also said to Joshua, in Du Bois's words, “What do you mean by saying God is you-all's father—is God a nigger?”

These White Folk finally brought Joshua before a judge from the North—but he “washed his hands of the whole matter.” The White crowd then seized Joshua and lynched him.

Since in our land today 100 years later there are still problems of discrimination and oppression because of race and/or class, perhaps this is the “Christmas story” we need to hear and to ponder this week. What do you think?

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This essay was first published in Dr. Seat's blog, **The View From This Seat.blogspot.com**

Dr. Leroy Seat and I studied together under the same professors for some years in graduate school in Louisville. Then we taught together for several decades on the same faculty of Seinan Gakuin University in Fukuoka, Japan. An outstanding professor, pastor, and administrator, he was elevated as Chancellor of the university for many years. You can enjoy the inspiring and insightful writings of this incurable reformer, creative thinker, and follower of Jesus by reading his blog. *D.K. Yagi*

Rev. Leroy Seat, Ph.D.
1307 Canterbury Ln
Liberty, MO 64068-3209
Tel. (816) 429-5205

Blog: <http://TheViewFromThisSeat.blogspot.com>
E-mail: LKSeat@gmail.com
Website: <http://www.4-lministries.net/>
Twitter: @LKSeat

ONE EYE ON THE BIBLE; THE OTHER EYE ON THE NEWSPAPER

Pope Francis: Civil Unions for Same Sex Couples

A documentary about Pope Francis premiered in Rome on October 21, 2020. In it Pope Francis endorsed civil unions for same sex couples, saying that a “civil cohabitation law” is necessary because same-sex couples “have the right to be covered legally.”

Within hours a Southern Baptist Convention agency head, as well as the current SBC president and a recent past president, put out statements blasting the pope. They simply condemned same sex marriage and did not comment on civil unions.

The Religious News Service (RNS) noted the Protestantizing of progressive Catholics, who were focusing on compassion toward couples, and the Catholicizing of Southern Baptists who were tightening control of institutional authority.

Religious News Service, Oct.30, 2020, Jacob Lupfer.

Hate Crimes: L.A. Vietnamese Temples

Huong Viet Temple in Santa Ana was vandalized. Outside the temple's entrance, 15 marble Buddhist statues were defaced with black spray paint. The name "Jesus" was sprayed down the spine of one statue. It was the sixth temple to be vandalized in the area within a month. Santa Ana Police Department declared it a "hate crime." Two women were caught on surveillance video wearing masks and defacing statues with spray cans at the Santa Ana temple. Three temples were in Garden Grove, two in Santa Ana, and one in Westminster. LATimes, Stephanie Lai, Nov. 29, 2020.



Some Core Values of CPAT

Black Lives Matter

Reform Police Brutality. (No choke holds, forbid no knock entries, no quasi police immunity, nat'l data base so convicted police cannot be hired in the next city, no shootings without body cameras, no rubber bullets, no political donations by police unions, no private prisons, social worker specialists to replace police dealing with homeless and mentally ill, no bicycle stops escalating to pointless killings.

Protecting Mother Earth, our only Space Ship

Keep the oil in the ground.

Stop the Keystone XL Pipeline.

Protect the Arctic Sanctuary from oil and gas drilling.

Protect National Parks and Monuments (Trump Administration opened Bear Ears and Grand Staircase-Excalante to oil drilling, fracking, and mining, 2/10/20).

Gender Equality

Equality for LGBTQ. (Supreme Court ruled LGBTQ cannot be fired from work for being gay 6/20.)

Equal pay for equal work (US women's soccer?)

Citizenship for DACA. (Supreme Court temporarily stopped DACA deportation 6/20).

America's Original Sins:

Stealing land from Native Americans by betraying treaties and genocide.

National economy built on 400 years of Black slave labor.

No Separation of Children from Refugee Parents on Southern Border. Numerous large detention centers are being built to warehouse these children. These replicate WW2 concentration camps for Japanese Americans.

Racial Equality: No White Supremacy

No racial profiling by police stop-and-search (vs. Afro-Americans).

No infiltration of mosques by FBI, CIA, Homeland Security.

No mass incarceration of Afro-Americans through unfair drug laws. (Rehabilitation instead of incarceration, fix drug laws.)

Freedom of Religion

Freedom for Uyghur Muslims in Xinjian Province.

Freedom for Tibetans in religion and politics.

Freedom for Rohingyas in Rakhine Province in Myanmar.

Religions waging peace, instead of war.

Preemptive strikes as crimes against humanity. (Iraq invasion)

Nuclear Weapons, Biological Weapons, Chemical Weapons, Neutron Bombs as Crimes Against Humanity.

Disarmament of Nuclear Weapons (No More Hiroshima-Nagasaki)

Religions networking for social justice in major cities (Jews, Muslims, Christians. Buddhists, and Hindus Together).

Power to the People, democracy.

Priority of the Poor. (Safety nets for the poor and vulnerable, Social Security, Medicare, food stamps, food banks, health insurance)

No US Visa Bans against Muslim majority nations.

(Sudan, Tanzania, Eritrea, Myanmar, Kyrgyzstan, and Nigeria were added to the visa ban, in addition to the 7 previous Muslim nations. 2/05/20).

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**Council for Pacific Asian Theology
P. O. Box 7270, Alhambra, CA 91802**

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Dickson Yagi: 909-788-7080 cell.

COUNCIL FOR PACIFIC ASIAN THEOLOGY

P. O. Box 7270, Alhambra, CA 91802

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Rev. Dr. Paul M. (d.2019) and Florence Nagano
florencenagano@aol.com, Phone: 626-863-5140
(Atherton Baptist Homes)
801 W. Commonwealth Ave.#14, Alhambra CA 91801

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dkyagi@icloud.com; Phone: 909-788-7080

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16915 Labrador St., Northridge, CA 91343
pshig2000@verizon.net; Phone: 818-893-1581

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216 S. Atlantic Blvd., Alhambra, CA 91801
michitanioka@gmail.com; Phone: 626-940-5834

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naomiw@netzero.net; Phone: (626) 524-5485

Financial Officer: Larry Naritomi
809 Browning Place, Monterey Park, CA 91755
lnaritomi@sbcglobal.net; Phone (626) 757 4822

Rev. Frederick Brenion
(Shinshu Buddhist, Higashi) fbrenion@gmail.com

Marion Shigekuni
pshig2000@verizon.net; Phone: 818-893-1581

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