

A REPORT OF MY WORK AT MINIDOKA

August 1942- August 1945

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Looking back over my three years in the Minidoka Relocation Center, I think of the experiences which occurred as some of the richest of my life. Those were eventful days: the first year of building a new community in a drab barrack city; the announcement of the opportunity for enlistment as volunteers in the ranks of the U.S. army and the turning of the tide for our acceptance into the stream of American life; the daily flow of people out from the center as they received clearance and relocated in the Middlewest and the East; the segregation program which separated the disloyal from the so-called disloyal evacuees; the unexpected but glad news of the lifting of restrictions for our return to the Pacific Coast in January, 1945; and finally, the announcement of the closing of the center. In between these days of high-peak experiences were days which barely crept by, days in which the monotony of group living in the center produced irritations which naturally come from too close proximity with fellow beings day after day. There were days of sadness during the waning period of the center as reports came back of the casualties of Hunt Nisei in the armed services overseas. Again, misunderstanding between the evacuees and the administration, oftentimes accompanied by strikes, increased the disharmony of life in the center. The "interlude" of evacuation and relocation center days was crammed with human pathos, joys, and conflicts.

One of my former high school teachers sent me a verse just before evacuation: "Who knoweth whether thou art not come to the kingdom for such a time as this?" (Esther 4:14b) Often this verse came into my mind during the evacuation experiences. After four months of internment in the Assembly

Center at Puyallup Fair Grounds in Washington, we were transported to the hastily erected barrack city in Southern Idaho. Here I found myself the only Christian worker trained for working with the Nisei young people. Here was the true test of both my theological training and my Christian faith.

One of the first tasks was to recruit leadership for Sunday Schools and for the religious program for youth. Preaching services were organized within two weeks. We were fortunate in having missionaries who voluntarily evacuated themselves from the West Coast to join us within several months. Among the first arrivals were the Rev. E.W. Thompson, Methodist missionary; Miss Esther McCollough and Rev. Emery Andrews, Baptist Home Mission workers. Later, others who helped in the youth program were Miss Gladys Kaiser, a Presbyterian missionary; Miss Ethel Hempstead, a former Methodist missionary in Japan and Miss Nora Bowman, also a former missionary in Japan for the Church of England. The lady missionaries spent a great deal of time with the Issei. Rev. Everett Thompson and I assumed full responsibility for work among the Nisei in the center. Rev. Emery Andrews divided his time equally between the center and looking after evacuee interests in Seattle. He drove a number of cars belonging to the evacuees from storage in Seattle to Hunt. We were also fortunate in the help that the local W.R.A. employees gave us in the church program. Without them and the missionaries, the Federated Christian Church would not have been able to serve the youth nearly as effectively. There was a constant turnover in the W.R.A. personnel, but those who stayed with us most of the time were Miss Alice Gwinn, Miss Ecco Hunt, Miss Jessie Koontz, Miss Minnie Schmidt, Miss Marie Johnson, and Mr. Willard Jaeger. Others who helped while they were at the center were Miss Lulu Jones, Mr. Robert Davidson, Mr. John Phillips, Mr. George Townsend, Miss Koch, Miss Maribelle Hines, Mr. Charles Fleischman, and others. Mrs. Everett Thompson and Mrs. Emery Andrews were most dependable helpers in our Church School. These were behind-the-scene workers.

The Federated Christian Church included Nisei who prior to evacuation, had been members of Baptist, Congregational, Episcopal, Holiness, Methodist, and Presbyterian churches. We enjoyed a prosperous church program during our first year. The Nisei Mass Choir of approximately 100 voices under the direction of Mrs. Mae Hara sang three times before audiences of approximately a thousand people each at Rupert, Twin Falls, and Jerome. Later, after Mrs. Hara's relocation, the directorship of the choir was taken over by Miss Waka Mochizuki. *After her relocation, we organized two separate choirs for our church services.* During the spring of 1943 relocation gained momentum as evacuees were cleared for resettling in the Midwestern and Eastern States.

As a Church, we tried to interpret the outside situation to the young people and counseled ^{with} them as they made plans for their future. The majority of our college-age young people relocated during 1943.

Our English worship services for Nisei were held at different ends of the camp. The attendance was well over 400 during the early days of the center. Later this dwindled down, but the average during the first two years, 1942-44, remained around 300. The third year found the services dwindling further in number until they were abandoned altogether in September of 1945.

Relocation was a potent factor in our work as it took our leadership away from the center, thus making it more difficult to keep up the program. During the last half of center life, our work was chiefly with the high school age youth and ^{children} the Church School.

Our youth program included the morning worship services, Church School classes, youth fellowship meetings, and mid-week Bible study. We had a guest speaker on the average of once a month, and frequently groups of Christian youth from outside churches in the nearby area came in for joint meetings on Sunday evenings. These gatherings were greatly anticipated by our youth. Even more so were trips to Christian Endeavor or denominational conferences on the outside. Each month we sent a group out to either a conference or a joint ^{youth} fellowship. During the first two years ^{we} were fortunate in being able to

One of our projects during the first year was to have a mid-week forum which would pack the living hall with students and visitors.

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acquisition government trucks for such outings. Later, when the use of these trucks was restricted, we chartered private buses. Our youth also looked forward to joint skating parties with church groups in Twin Falls.

Many youth found opportunities for service in editing the Church paper, "The Herald." Among the editors were Kaz Taka, Akira Makino, Hiroshi and Masaru Odoi, Hiroto Zakoji, Masakii Fujihara, Calvin Oba, Eunice Torii, and Helen Morioka. There was usually a staff of six to ten assisting in the production of this weekly paper which had a circulation of 600. Others helped by doing secretarial work in the Church office, teaching Church School classes, arranging worship centers for the regular worship services, ushering, delivering messages and notices on the church bicycle, publicizing meetings, and singing in the choirs.

During the summers of 1943, 1944 and 1945 we sent delegates to church camps operated by the Christian, Baptist, Methodist and Presbyterian churches. In the summer of 1943, there were 70 in attendance; in 1944 we sent 80 and in 1945, 44. Full scholarships were given to some of the young people and others received scholarships covering one-half of their expenses. Through the cooperation of the Student Christian Association we were able to send delegates to a number of regional and national conferences. In December of 1943 we sent a delegate, Hiroto Zakoji, to the National Conference for students at Wooster, Ohio. Two delegates were sent with permission of the Western Defense Command in 1944 to the Student Christian Association Conference at Seabeck, Wash. In the same year we sent two girls to the Baptist Arra Wanna in Oregon and two boys to the Student Christian Association Conference at Estes Park, Colorado. In 1945, we again had the privilege of being represented at Seabeck. Also a delegate was sent to the Institute of International Relations in Portland, Oregon. These conferences were helpful in enlarging horizons of many youth and giving them faith and confidence in the future.

In March of 1943 we observed our first Religious Emphasis Week. The speakers were local men of various denominations: Rev. Charles Horejs of Jerome, Rev. Brooks Moore of Burley and Rev. Mark Cronenberger of Twin Falls. In November of the same year with the cooperation of the Dept. of Evangelism of the Federal Council of Churches, a National Christian Mission was held. Our speakers included the Rev. Herbert Nicholson of Pasadena, Calif.; Mr. Henry Croes of Linfield College, Dr. George Roseberry of Twin Falls, and Dr. Harold V. Jensen of Seattle. In April of 1945 the Young People's Christian Conference was held at Hunt. This was the culmination of happy church memories for the teen-age young people in their three years of relocation center life. Among the leaders who made it worthwhile were Rev. Ennis Whaley, Miss Isabelle Gates, Rev. Bill Genne, all of Portland, Oregon, and Dr. George Roseberry of Twin Falls.

In our work constant emphasis was put on the world-wide mission of the Church. The presence of former missionaries to Japan was symbolic of the missionary outreach of the Christian faith. Our missionary giving to the denominations represented in the Federated Church reflect this spirit. In 1943, the young people and children in the Church School gave \$540.55. The following year we gave \$568.67.

Our record of baptisms total 103 young people. Over a half of these came out of non-Christian backgrounds. In addition nine babies were baptized and eleven dedicated. Twenty-two Methodist young people were confirmed. Those preferring immersion were baptized by Rev. Emery Andrews in the First Baptist Church in Twin Falls. We are gratified especially by the decisions being made by young people after relocation. (Those known personally to myself include Alice Kawasaki who identified herself with the Northshore Baptist Church in Chicago and Mas Hamada in Huntington, West Virginia.)

The Federated Christian Church members also acted as distributing agents for the Christmas gifts sent to the center from interested Church groups. Many of our young people assisted in wrapping gifts, sorting miscellaneous packages and writing thank-you notes.

It was my privilege not only to serve with my co-workers in the Church program but also to participate in other types of community activities. Among these were: advisor of the Hunt Hi-Y Club, Boy Scout committeeman, Cub-master for the local Cub Pack, chairman of the local Y.M.C.A. Board, sponsor of the Block 28 Neighborhood Y Club, and member of the Relocation Planning Committee. The relocation of capable leaders from the center placed a greater burden of responsibility on those of us who remained until the closing days.

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One cannot erase memories of evacuation and relocation center days from the mind. They are indelibly a part of us. There have been valuable lessons learned about people and human relationships. Some of the friendships made will be lifelong ones. The greatest reward and satisfaction in my work has come from the privilege of helping young people grow in ~~the~~ Christian ~~understanding~~ faith. From our group are emerging young people who will ^a make/real contribution in the building of a Christian nation and world.

The encouragement, the financial and moral support, of our American Baptist Home Mission Society gave that feeling of security which enabled me to minister with confidence and without worry about the temporal needs of life. I am especially grateful for the opportunities made possible by Dr. John W. Thomas for occasional trips away from the center. They enabled me to maintain a clear perspective.