

A REPORT OF MY WORK AT MINIDOKA

RELOCATION CENTER

August 1942 - August 1945

Teutomu Fukuyama

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 loyal from the so-called disloyal evacuees; the unexpected but happy news of the lifting of restrictions for our return to the Pacific Coast in January, 1945; and finally, 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 human 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 Hisei in the armed services overseas. Again misunderstanding between evacuees and administration, oftentimes accompanied by strikes, increased the disharmony 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 interment 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 our youth. Preaching services were organized within two weeks. We were fortunate in having missionaries who voluntarily evacuated themselves from the West Coast 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 their 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. We drove a number of cars belonging to the evacuees from storage in Seattle to Hunt. <sup>we</sup> 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 one or two others. Mrs. Everett Thompson and Mrs. Emery Andrews were dependable 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 church 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. Another of our projects was a midweek forum with attendances running into 300.

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. A great number of the Nisei received scholarship aid through the National Student Relocation Council.

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, 1943-44, 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 difficult to keep up the program. During the last half of our center life, we were devoting our energy in work with the high school age youth and children.

Our youth program included the morning worship services, Church School classes, youth fellowship meetings, and mid-week Bible or missions 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. We enjoyed a fine fellowship with the Baptist, Christian, Presbyterian and Methodist churches of the nearby towns. During the first two years <sup>we</sup> were fortunate in being able to requisition gov't. trucks for such outings. Later, when the use of these trucks was restricted, we were able to charter 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 Tada, Akira Makino, Hirochi and Masaru Odoi, Hiroto Zakoji, Masaki 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 office, teaching Sunday School classes, arranging worship centers for the regular services, cleaning up after the 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 the church camps operated by the Christian, Baptist, Methodist, and Presbyterian churches. In the summer of 1943, there were 70 in attendance; in 1944, 80 and in 1945, 44. Full scholarships were given to some of the young people and others received grants 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 <sup>Association</sup> Conference at Seabock, Wash. We also obtained permission to send three girls to the Baptist Arra Hanna Camp in Oregon. Two boys were sent the same year to the Student Christian

Association Conference at Estes Park, Colorado. In 1945, we again had the privilege of being represented at Seabeek with two delegates. Also, a delegate was sent to the Institute of International Relations in Portland, Oregon. These conferences were helpful in enlarging the 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 Jorojs 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 youth in their three years of relocation center life. The official registration was 400 with a total of 3800 attending the scheduled meetings. 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, 1944, 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 (Methodist) 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. Many were introduced to the Christian Church in the center and have continued their church attendance on the outside.

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 a member of the Relocation Planning Commission. The relocation of capable leaders from the center placed a greater burden of responsibility on those of us who remained until the closing days.

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.

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 Christian faith. From our group are emerging young people who will make a real contribution in the building of a Christian nation and world.

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Appended to this report are a few representative testimonies from our young people. I asked Tad Muraoka, now relocated in Detroit, to write especially for this report. The others are mostly excerpts from letters; two of them were personal testimonies written in the center.

I have been going to various churches in an effort to find a church home. I think I have found it already but I am still going the rounds. It's an education in itself to meet new congregations, listen to different ministers, and to see the way people think in various churches.

Suzanne Nakano, Seattle

Since the time we left Seattle I've had hundreds of opportunities to see the Christian spirit in operation, and because of - not in spite of - everything I've experienced during the past three years I feel as if I've now found the right road leading to the light. I'm still in the searching stage, but at least I'm no longer in the darkness. I feel grateful, therefore, for all my experiences.

Martha Higashida, New York

I am happy to say I have truly accepted Jesus Christ as my Savior, read the Bible and pray with deep thought in my heart.

Frank Kanatani, Lake Forest, Ill.

Our son Jeffrey Tsutomu is almost two years old. We named him after you, Tsutomu. Although, we have not written we have thought of you often, and though you may not have known it you have guided us toward living a better life. Vern and I are going to join the local church - the Verdun United Church.

Mrs. Vernon Shinotakahara, Verdun, Canada

To me the Christian attitude of brotherliness is the only effective way of bringing about a permanent world peace. No political, economic, or social reform can match the deep, sincere, and non-prejudiced mind with which Christians are bridging the gaps of misunderstanding among people.

Teddy Takaya, Portland, Oregon

I see now a definite purpose in life. I have more of a sense of responsibility now than I have ever had. When before I was either too stupid or too calloused to extend sympathy, I am much more sympathetic and understanding. As I repeat, these are small things, but I have learned to appreciate God in these simple things. Christ has an effect on the soul as no other factor has.

Christianity has given me confidence in the future. I believe only a Christian can have such complete confidence. When I venture into anything I feel the assurance of God behind me. I believe that if I lost the Christian religion I would almost immediately become irresponsible, egotistical, selfish and an intemperate person. Christ has meant to me as much as water to a flower.

Calvin Oba

As I ponder over my Christian life, my thoughts wander back to the desolate life in the Relocation Center at Hunt, Idaho. For 20 years, all of life until then, I had been a Buddhist and had never been inside a Christian Church. Yet here in the desert of Idaho, having gone through the experience of evacuation from my home on the West Coast and feeling bitterness and discouragement, I felt the need of something stronger to hold on to. I cannot explain why, but I decided to attend Christian Church services in the spring of 1943. Hearing the Gospel message given by the minister, I sensed that there was something real in the suffering of Christ which he met with forgiveness and by keeping faith. Although there were many things still strange to me, here at Hunt was my start in the Christian life.

Each Sunday I attended church services in the morning and the youth fellowship in the evening. Although I was a bit timid about going, I found a friendly welcome and discovered many new friends through these meetings. It was both inspiring and interesting to hear the minister speak about Christ and also to have evacuees who had recently returned from the relocation center return and tell us of the friendly welcome they had received, especially among Christian groups. I thought of those of us who were carrying on in His steps making finding places for to sleep, work, etc. How welcome in their communities, how much we enjoyed the fine fellowship with the various young people's groups from neighboring towns who visited us, and whom in turn we visited. The children in the center received great happiness at Christmas time as thousands of gifts poured in from all over the country. Daily if this was Christianity, I wanted to

I found myself forgetting the bitterness of evacuation, forgetting what had happened by looking ahead and being able to say as Christ did: "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do."

It has been three years now since I became a Christian, Easter, 1943, was the day I accepted Christ as my Saviour. These last three years have been the happiest of my life. During this time there have been the challenges and opportunities for service in the relocation center, by helping the children with wholesome recreation in the schools, Y.M.C.A., Boy Scouts, etc., teaching them to play fair, and by teaching a Sunday school class of boys and girls to live the kind of life Christ wants us to. Also there were outside experiences of attending youth conferences, especially the Idaho Fellowship where with young people of various racial and cultural backgrounds we developed individually though group experience in a variety of intercultural relationships, through cooperative living, community service, and deepening spiritual discovery in a world framework.

And now today, here in Detroit I have the opportunity of carrying on, attending a regular church service in the morning and in the evening, attending the Nisei-Caucasian Fellowship at the First Baptist Church where Nisei who have relocated here can come together with those of different racial backgrounds in Christian fellowship.

Although, we did lose materially through evacuation, God made His purpose triumph over wrong, and I have received many spiritual blessings which tend to make up for the material loss. I thank God for His guidance.

Ted Murakami,  
Detroit, Michigan