

# From Internment to Hospitality

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by Rob Leveridge

In 1942, Masayoshi Wakai received his Bachelor of Divinity from The Pacific School of Religion at Berkeley, CA (PSR) in absentia, because he was interned in an evacuation camp as a Japanese-born American.

Sixty-six years later, Rev. Wakai shared his story with me. It's a story of a life in ministry taking shape for a man faced with both alienation and hospitality.

Born in Japan to a Japanese Congregationalist minister who had converted from Buddhism, Masayoshi Wakai ("Mas" to friends) was raised in Kauai, the northernmost island of Hawaii, as a member of the Kapua Congregational Church. As the oldest son, Wakai followed in his father's footsteps and entered seminary at PSR to study for the ministry.

While studying theology, Wakai was a student minister at Plymouth Congregational Church in Oakland, CA, where he worked under the guidance of The Rev. Robert Inglis, a 1925 graduate of Chicago Theological Seminary. Rev. Inglis had developed very strong relationships in ministry with the Japanese community in the San Francisco area.

Mas Wakai taught Sunday school, and worked as an advisor with the youth group. As pastor of an all-white congregation, Rev. Inglis had wanted someone of another race to work with the church's youth, feeling that young people should have the opportunity to learn from people of other backgrounds.

When the United States entered World War II after the bombing of Pearl Harbor, Japanese residents and Americans of Japanese descent living on the west coast began to suffer a variety of indignities from some Americans and from government authorities, culminating with the creation of Evacuation and Relocation camps.

Rev. Inglis was vehemently opposed to the relocation of Japanese communities, and became a very vocal leader in a movement of public opposition to the internment of the Japanese. In the end, over one hundred thousand people in California and Hawaii were forced from their homes into War Relocation Camps.

Inglis and his parishioners visited the camps frequently, and Plymouth Congregational Church stored personal belongings of evacuated families whose homes had been taken from them.

Wakai and his seminary classmate George Aki were assigned to The Tanforan Assembly Center, a horse racing track that was converted to contain people while more permanent facilities were being constructed elsewhere in the country.

During this internment, the two seminarians were approached by Rev. Inglis about a service of ordination in the camp. Wakai recalls, "It meant for us to write our ordination papers in our horse stables far into the night while disturbing our neighbors in the adjoining stalls." Many different Congregationalist churches sent delegates, and Wakai and Aki were ordained at Tanforan.

A few months later, Wakai was sent to the Topaz Relocation Center, a permanent facility in Utah, where many Japanese lived until the war's end. However, some of the interned residents were granted leave if they could demonstrate certain types of productive engagement in society, such as working for local farms or enrolling in colleges far from the west coast.

Wakai had met Albert Palmer, then the president of CTS, when Palmer was on a speaking tour in California a couple of years prior. He wrote to Palmer about his circumstances, and Palmer invited him to study at CTS, which required to Palmer to make special arrangements with the University of Chicago, which at the time did not allow resident aliens to enroll in classes (in 1943, CTS had partnered with the U of C through a Federated Faculty, and Wakai was not a U.S. citizen.). Wakai came to Chicago, moved into Davis Hall, and began classes at CTS. ▶



Hefen and Masayoshi Wakai

Fairly quickly, he felt a strong urge to begin working in ministry, and he never completed a degree at CTS. He worked for the Hyde Park YMCA, and then for the Play Club of Chicago. While in Hyde Park, Mas met his wife Helen who was studying at the University in The School of Social Work, and they moved to Hawaii together in 1946, after the war ended.

Wakai was pastor of The Honomu Congregational Church on the island of Hawaii until 1955, and then worked for the State of Hawaii Correctional Department as a counselor and chaplain for 20 years. After retirement, Mas and Helen were commissioned by the United Church of Christ as missionaries and worked at the Nagasaki Junior College in southern Japan. Upon returning to Hawaii, the Wakais spent several years in part-time ministry performing weddings before fully retiring in the mid-1990s.

Masayoshi Wakai is a wonderful person to talk to. He tells his story without bitterness toward the fearful wartime society that mistreated him, or overblown flattery for the people who helped and taught him during those years. He simply speaks with a calm spirit of celebration about the rich life he has lived, and he's happy to say how important CTS has been to him over the years.

In a letter to the CTS *Tower News*, Rev. Wakai writes, "At age 92, I am okay physically and mentally and spiritually. The Good Lord has been kind and bountiful in His blessings to me, my wife Helen and our two sons Eugene and Allen and their families. Aloha and God's blessings to you!" ●



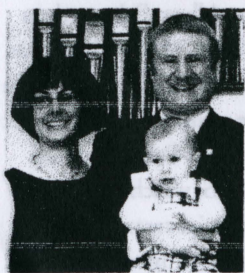
**THE REV. ROBERT INGLIS** graduated from CTS and was ordained in 1925. He served churches in Emporia, KS, and Grinnell, IA, before becoming pastor of Plymouth Congregational in Oakland, CA.

Rev. Wakai says of Inglis, "He was a very liberal, thoughtful and very caring person. He gave me a good start."

In 1946, The Pacific School of Religion in Berkely, CA, awarded Inglis an honorary doctorate in recognition of his bold leadership publicly opposing the mistreatment and relocation of Japanese citizens and residents on the west coast.

Later in his career, Inglis pastored in Wittier, CA, and became a conference minister in Colorado for the Congregational Christian Church.

Robert's brother Irvin Inglis was also a CTS graduate and a Congregationalist minister. Between the two of them, they had 3 sons who became ministers in the United Church of Christ. Robert's grandson is The Rev. David Inglis, who graduated from CTS in 2006 and serves The First Congregational Church UCC in Crystal Lake, IL. ●



The Rev. David Inglis (CTS, 2006) with his spouse, Felicia Moller (CTS, 2007) and their son, Zachary.

**A**LBERT PALMER was president of CTS from 1930 until 1945, serving the institution through the years of the Great Depression and World War II. Prior to becoming president, Palmer was pastor of Plymouth Congregational Church in Oakland until 1917, then served Central Union Church on the island of Honolulu, HI until 1924, and the First Congregational Church (Now First United Church) of Oak Park, IL, until 1929.

Palmer's successor, Auther McGiffert, said of him, "Palmer carried over into the presidency of the Seminary his conception of the role of the minister as a servant of the community, both ecclesiastical and secular."

In Palmer's inauguration address in November of 1930, he said, "The minister of tomorrow must be a social engineer, knowing social facts and forces; and a physician of the soul, knowing the inner lives and problems of his people; and a scholar, knowing the history and the living issues of religious thought."

In 1940, CTS student Howard Schomer (who would become president of CTS in 1959) refused to register for the military draft, because he would not accept the deferrment that was automatically granted to members of the clergy. His conviction was based on the congregationalist principle that ministers are not to be separated from laity. Furthermore, accepting the deferrment would prevent him from registering his objection to the war. Albert Palmer took



Schomer's case to the Selective Service in Washington, D.C. and achieved a new ruling whereby clergy need not accept the deferrment granted by the Selective Service Act, but may receive the same treatment as any other citizen. Schomer then registered as a conscientious objector and entered the Civilian Public Service.

Throughout his time as president, Palmer taught a course, "The Principles of Preaching". Themes emphasized in his course outline included, "Be scrupulously fair. Don't caricature. Be candid. Don't dodge issues. Bring all things to the judgment seat of Christ. Keep in mind what the pew would say to the pulpit."

Mas Wakai says of Palmer, "He was a very liberal and very caring person. CTS is dear to me because he was willing to take me in." ●