

Church Women Ask:

How  
Can we  
help  
Japanese American  
Evacuees  
?

By Gracia D. Booth

HOW CAN WE HELP  
JAPANESE AMERICAN  
EVACUEES?

*Suggestions  
for Church Women*

by  
GRACIA D. BOOTH

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## I SAW THEM GO

DAY after day, week after week, I watched them quietly preparing for evacuation, leaving farms with promising young crops and closing out in a few days and at a great loss businesses which represented years of struggle. I saw little children going home from school for the last time, their chubby arms laden with slates and books, crayons and cut-outs, and "good-bye" gifts from teachers and playmates. I saw teen-age boys and girls, pretending that they didn't care, that it was just another adventure, but bursting into tears at the slightest signs of sympathy. I saw college youths leaving the lecture room and the unfinished college course, with never a word of self-pity, talking far into the night with some of us about the possible future of the younger generation on the one hand, and of their helpless, aging parents on the other—bravely assuming a sense of responsibility for both.

Saddest of all to see were the mothers with tight-set faces and steady hands as they quietly went about their task, breaking up their homes—"folding up housekeeping," as they put it. Ordered to report for evacuation with only what each could carry in his two hands—usually no more than a roll of bedding and a suitcase or bundle of clothing—they sorted and chose, quietly discarding treasures no money could ever have bought from them, as they carefully selected for each member of the family those bare necessities of clothing and bedding to carry out into their wilderness camp-home—God alone knew where!

That was back in February of 1942, when the Government decided that military necessity demanded the evacuation from the Western Defense Command Area of all persons of Japanese descent, citizens and aliens alike—110,000 in all. Church women all up and down the coast rallied around their darker-skinned neighbors, eager to help them through this trying experience in every way possible and to express their deep regret. Their genuinely friendly interest and sympathy drew into their ranks scores of other women of good will from Jewish and Catholic groups, the Y.W.C.A., Parent Teachers Associations, Negro and Mexican women and many, many individuals from college, university and business women's clubs.

Wherever a group assembled for evacuation, be it 100 or 1,000, these "good neighbors" came too. Men, women and young people not only prepared and served breakfast to the evacuees, with the sincere

wish for their welfare and speedy return, but on every hand was heard over and over again the assurance: "We will *never* stop working until you are free again!" And they left us with a smile on their lips and a great big hope in their hearts because of this promise and these sincere good wishes.

When the first Christmas in camp came around, the evacuees had still further evidence of the loving concern of Christian people who had not forgotten. Thousands of gifts arrived at the Relocation Centers from all over the country and a season that had been so dreaded by them became a real festival of joy. This expression of a true spirit of friendliness had helped to dispel their sense of utter isolation and despair. Not only on the West Coast but throughout the land the friendly feeling of the people on "the outside" expressed itself in the great outpouring of gifts, including money. And in the minds of those who had promoted the Christmas gift project the question arose as to whether the time had not come when the very best way for the church people to express their friendship was to help the people in the Centers to become satisfactorily resettled and integrated into normal communities on "the outside," just as speedily as possible.

For almost two years now, under governmental direction, the evacuees have been venturing forth from the Relocation Centers, courageously determined to build for themselves once again a brave new world of home and business, school and community life outside the camps. Many of these resettlers are forced to accept employment in occupations other than the ones in which they were trained or engaged prior to the war—and that takes courage! But, since the same necessity exists for millions of other Americans, they do not complain—endeavoring to fit into the job opportunities which are open to them, and are proving themselves unusually adaptable and successful in whatever work they undertake.

It is our Christian privilege to help them in every possible way as they so valiantly struggle to put down their roots again and to make a home for themselves and their loved ones in our midst, so that with hearts and minds once more at ease after the tragedy of their uprooting and so many months "on the shelf" they may attain to some sense of permanency and belonging. And so with a few settled here and a few settled there throughout our vast country, they may once more become an integral part of the democratic life of America—making their own unique contribution to the common good.

Just how successful they are in this attempt at social and economic readjustment and rehabilitation depends as much upon you and me as upon the relocatee himself—or possibly more.

## JUST WHAT CAN YOU DO?

### *Offer Employment*

THE first requisite for relocation is of course a job for the employable evacuees. Officers of the field offices of the War Relocation Authority carry the responsibility in this respect and are most grateful for each and every offer of employment coming to their desks. Surely you can find some possible job in your community for a prospective resettler, or resettling family. Address the Committee on Resettlement of Japanese Americans, 297 Fourth Avenue, New York 10, N. Y., for information as to the War Relocation Authority office nearest you.

### *Help Find Housing*

Next to a job, and vitally important, is a place to live. Housing is scarce for anyone in almost every community where good jobs are available. Both the W.R.A. officer and the resettler need all the assistance that interested individuals and groups can give along this line. Those who have spent some time in the Relocation Centers, counselling in regard to relocating family groups and also working on the outside, realize that the resettlement program has been slowed up tremendously because of lack of places to live, even when there are from one to a dozen good jobs to choose from. In some cities, the different denominational groups have undertaken to help find good job openings in their community and then worked together to locate a house or apartment in a friendly neighborhood to shelter "their family"—making a project of it in which first their church constituency and then the whole community has taken part. In this way not only the housing problem but the whole problem of community integration may be taken care of and a friendly welcome assured the newcomer from the beginning.

### *Organize a Citizens' Committee*

Perhaps the best way to help solve this problem is by the early organization of a citizens' committee with representatives of the various community groups such as Parent Teachers Association,

Y.M.C.A., Y.W.C.A., American Association of University Women, Business Women's Clubs, Kiwanis and Rotary Clubs, Church Councils, Catholic Welfare, Jewish Sisterhoods, Ministerial Associations, U.S.O., and Red Cross Units. Each of these will probably play some part sooner or later in the life of the persons or family groups resettling in the community and, by extending an early welcome from their group, they will help allay the nervous fear of discrimination in the minds of the resettlers as well as prepare the community for their coming. Because of their own generally recognized good position and repute, such groups can also contribute much toward the general enlightenment of the public and so aid in widespread community acceptance by openly backing the whole project from the start.

### **Open a Hostel**

In cities where housing is difficult and no hostel is in operation, one of the most vital needs may be met by the speedy formation of a committee to plan for the opening of such a hostel, with every community organization possible backing up your project. A hostel provides a temporary home until the resettler has found employment and a permanent residence. Most hostels have been sponsored by some church group or by a committee of representatives of various denominational and civic groups.

Where there is already a hostel in operation, a very helpful service can be rendered by local church women calling several times each week to meet and become acquainted with new arrivals and, at the same time, become cognizant of the housing or other personal needs of each one and so be better equipped to give practical advice and assistance. Entirely aside from such practical and material assistance, the boosting of morale such interest gives is of almost inestimable worth.

Another very worthwhile service can be rendered by the establishment of cooperatively run dormitories for unattached young people whose parents may be still in camp. Especially is this sort of housing needed by young girls in large crowded cities where adequate, inexpensive housing is so difficult to find and loneliness after work hours a grave and serious problem.

### **Meet the Train**

It is always of great encouragement to the incoming evacuee to be met at the train, not just by the hostel director or some evacuee friend whom he has a right to expect, but by some other friendly individual

as well, whose presence there and offer of friendship is a most encouraging surprise and the first big step in overcoming a very natural nervousness and dread at entering the "outside world" again—often all alone.

### ***Invite Them to Your Meetings***

Invitations to church affairs, besides the regular church service, to missionary study groups, first aid classes, Red Cross units, P.T.A. meetings and pre-natal clinics, all the regular groups of the community to which other average Americans go, are of inestimable value in making the stranger welcome and at ease. And, at the same time, he or she may have much to give which will make such meetings of greater interest to all.

### ***Invite Them to Your Home — Visit Theirs***

One of the most deeply appreciated of all friendly overtures is the invitation to dinner in your home. From there on, real and lasting friendships will develop more naturally. Call on them in their own homes too, soon and often—keeping up the interchange of friendly visiting.

### ***Do Things Together***

Invitations to go with you to art galleries, museums, etc., and to offer to accompany a new arrival on the first shopping trip and to the ration board are most gratefully accepted as a rule, and deeply appreciated. The meetings of the P.T.A., too, are splendid occasions for mother to meet mother and become acquainted on the basis of their mutual interest in child and teacher and the things of the home.

Where your children meet evacuee children on an equal footing in the schoolroom and on the playground, you can encourage your own to bring their little new friends home to play, and follow up this contact with a call on the mother of your children's new playmates. Children are invariably free from race consciousness if allowed to follow their own instincts uninfluenced by adult prejudices. for—

"In hearts too young for enmity  
There lies the way to make men free.  
When children's friendships are world-wide,  
New ages may be glorified.  
Let child love child and wars shall cease;  
Disarm the heart—therein lies peace!"

### **Invite Speakers**

Another very fruitful way of spreading friendly interest in relocation and enlightening the general public in regard to the evacuee is by calling upon the local W.R.A. office or the hostel for young people from the evacuee group to attend various church and young people's meetings and to speak, thus giving first-hand information to many people who are essentially kindly and desirous of helping, but who do not know where or how to begin. Often just a lack of information regarding the evacuation and the resettlement program is responsible for inaction on the part of a great number of potentially very helpful people. To become personally acquainted with someone from the Japanese American group almost always tips the balance favorably where fine people who never before knew anyone of Japanese extraction hesitated to do or to say anything in their favor.

Great emphasis has been placed in the camps on a broad and healthy athletic and recreational program. The young folk miss this natural outlet for emotional and nervous tension when alone in a new setting. Encouraging them, especially the lads, to join in such activities with your young people is a helpful and most kindly contribution.

The splendid old parents of Japanese Americans are inordinately proud of their sons and grandsons in the Service, and this sense of proud loyalty is a very fine point of contact for most of us whose sons also are fighting for the Democracy which we should wish to prove, by our own actions, really can work at home, even in time of war!

### **What Can You as an Individual Church Woman Do?**

First, you can create a link of goodwill and Christian fellowship with sister Christians in the various camps, by obtaining names of women and young girls, not necessarily of your own denomination, with whom to correspond. They are so hungry for every bit of news about the "outside" and revel in all the little personal "woman things" two women can share even in letters; and they eagerly look forward to news of a general nature, too. They are thirsty to hear of successful readjustments being made by evacuees who have preceded them, especially from their own camp community. They love to hear of school and community activities and to know something about the general attitude toward resettlers. Detailed information about hous-



ing, food and clothing prices, wages, etc., is of great interest and really of great help as they plan their own resettling. The scrapbooks made and sent into camps by many young people's and missionary groups are worn out in no time, so great is the concern to become acquainted with the parks and playgrounds, the public schools and libraries, the residential and business sections of the city in which they hope to resettle. Encouraging correspondence on the part of children and young people is also of great value, helping to build one more "bridge" and often planting the seed for a life-time friendship "outside."

### **"Adopt" a War Wife**

Many young war wives are finding it exceedingly difficult to relocate or, having relocated, to remain outside the camps once their husbands are inducted and the women left to fend for themselves, often among strangers and with a babe on the way. In some communities the local church women have "adopted" several such war wives and have mothered them in every way possible—helping to find a house or apartment where two or three of them may live together, helping them to find full or part-time jobs, and often sharing in the care of the children while the little mothers work. Thus, they do not feel compelled to go back home to mother in the Relocation Center—if they really wish to become permanently established outside.

### **Have an Exhibit of the Handiwork of Evacuees**

In every camp the older folks and especially the women have amazed us all with the beautiful objects of art and craft work which they have created during their leisure hours. Many Y.W.C.A. and church groups are obtaining from someone inside the camp, samples of such work to be displayed and often sold at their public meetings. To those who make them, the proceeds are a great help in relocating outside, to say nothing of the helpful impression such displays make upon people attending the meetings. People inside the camps are more than eager to supply such displays upon request. Usually there are lovely floral corsages or pins made of chenille or of tiny shells from the bed of a dried-up lake, tinted by hand so as to seem unusually real; also there are pins and trays and other articles beautifully carved by hand from bits of roots and wood, and lovely hand knitted or crocheted articles, too, which anyone would be proud to own.

## LOVE IS THE KEY

WHEN the first order for evacuation came out, unable to endure just "doing nothing" about it, I went down to the Post Office in Los Angeles early on the first morning of registration. As I hurried into the building I was conscious of a little woman sitting off to one side alone on the stone steps, weeping bitterly, apparently oblivious to all about her. Turning back, I sat down beside her and spoke reassuringly. Not understanding English too well, she drew away in fear and suspicion. Her little girl, less than two years old, was pulling at her mother's skirt for attention, but the mother seemed completely unconscious of her presence. I smiled and held out my hand and, after staring at me for a moment, the baby's sobs gradually ceased and, climbing up the steps to where I was sitting on the wide cement bannisters, she dropped down beside me and with complete confidence snuggled her head upon my lap. As I gently stroked her hair I could see through my tears that she had fallen asleep, completely exhausted. Then the miracle happened! In a few moments I felt the little mother creep close to my side and leaning her head against my shoulder she sobbed gently as if in relief, and then her small brown hand crept up over my lap and came to rest on top of my hand on top of her baby's head. And so we sat for a long, long time in complete silence—two mothers with no basis of understanding either in language or in common experience, but closely drawn together by the spiritual bond of our common motherhood, for mother love and sympathy are the same in every language. Then I *knew* that the field of opportunity and service open to me was far more challenging than I had yet dreamed it could be and, in my heart, I silently dedicated my strength and time and ability to that "ministry of sympathy" toward my unfortunate neighbors for the weeks and months ahead, whatever it might involve.

And that same challenge to all womankind is just as great today, that sympathetic understanding just as necessary, for we women are, in a very real sense, custodians of love and tenderness. May we not fail when our opportunity comes!

"Whenever there are hungry in my street  
Or when I listen to a heart's hurt cry  
Because *someone* has failed to keep high faith  
May my heart question—'Master, was it I?'"

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