

James Sakoda  
Tule Lake, California

September 30, 1942

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## INTERVIEW

### History of the Tule Lake Union Church

As Told to James Sakoda by Rev. Kuroda

Pre-Organization Period. The first colonists to enter Tule Lake arrived on May 27, 1942. It was not until the following month that a Christian reverend came to live with the colonists. On May 31, however, a group of young people under the leadership of Tom Uyeno and Tom Okabe observed Sunday. Through Ted Waller, head of the Recreation Department, Rev. George Almond, minister of the Tule Lake church, was invited to deliver the sermon.

On June 2, Rev. Andrew Kuroda arrived with the people from Salem, Oregon. A meeting of leaders of Christian young people from various districts was called together on the 4th, and plans were made for the next/coming week. The following Sunday morning Sunday School was held for the children. The worship service for adults given by Rev. Kuroda attracted about thirty people. In the evening Donald Dodd from a nearby town spoke to about fifty young people. These first meetings were largely voluntary in nature.

Another meeting of the young people was held soon after and Perry Saito was chosen to handle the young people's service, while Mrs. Kuroda was selected as the Sunday School superintendent. This arrangement was maintained until the Sacramento group arrived in Tule Lake.

Organization Period. With the Sacramento group arrived Rev. Igarashi and Rev. Tanabe. On June 22, a meeting of Christian leaders was called and the organization of a Christian church in the Colony discussed. Some of the people from Sacramento desired to continue with their own church in their own ward, leaving Ward I to Rev. Kuroda. The latter, who was in charge of a community church in Salem, was opposed to this idea of splitting the organization of the

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Christian church. After some discussion the leaders decided that they would have one community or union church in the Colony. This was the beginning of the permanent Protestant Church organization in Tule Lake.

After the people from Arboga Assembly Center entered the Colony a meeting of all former church officers was called. Among the Isseis the church organization in the Colony was discussed formally for the first time. One Issei from a Presbyterian, especially, was in favor of retaining separate denominations. After some heated discussion the group voted to have a community church rather than denominational churches. The group decided to have a steward in each ward, who would be in charge of nine blocks. The blocks in turn were to elect a block steward.

Name. For the name of the Protestant non-denominational church in the Colony the designation "Community Church" was not employed because there was a community church in the town of Tule Lake. "Tule Lake Christian Church" was at first selected as a name; but as there was a denomination called "Christian Church," the present name of "Tule Lake Union Church" was adopted.

Method of Election. In deciding how the ward stewards should be chosen, the Isseis desired to have the ministers appoint the ward stewards among themselves. Rev. Kuroda, on the other hand, desired to have the people of the block elect their own block stewards, who might in turn elect their own ward stewards. After some discussion the Isseis were allowed to have the ward stewards in their own fashion, that is, by appointment. One minister suggested that all ward stewards be former officers of a church. Rev. Kuroda opposed this on the ground that outside ties should be forgotten entirely, and the other minister's suggestion was overruled. Subsequently, however, there has been no trouble concerning the choice of ward stewards.

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Pinedale Group. When the Pinedale group entered the Colony, there were Issei ministers among the party who preferred to stay close to their own group and retain their own denominational churches. On July 28, the second general meeting of Issei representatives was held, and this matter discussed. Representatives from the Pinedale group finally accepted the single community church idea. On July 26, representatives of the Christian young people, including those from Pinedale, had called their office board meeting, and had accepted the community church setup.

Board of Directors. The Tule Lake Union Church is controlled by a Board of Directors composed of eight Issei ward stewards, their secretary and treasurer, eight Nisei ward stewards, their secretary and treasurer, and twelve ministers. The ministers, however, have only one vote among themselves. The chairman of the Board is Rev. Sasaki.

Objections to a Community Church. As was indicated before there was some opposition to the idea of doing away with denominational churches. The strongest objection seems to have come from Baptists, who desired to retain their entity as a group. It is an interesting thing that their doctrine, which stresses "emersion," is considered conservative among theological circles. As a group Baptists are generally not in favor of many liberal thoughts maintained by some church people. There was also some objection to a community church from the Presbyterians. In their church structure they have elders and deacons among the lay churchmen, and only elders are allowed to preside at services. If this structure were to be maintained rigidly, it would have been necessary to form a separate Presbyterian church. One Issei Methodist minister declared that his people (from Pinedale ?) desired a separate Methodist church. Although his

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objections were overruled, an eighth ward was created from Blocks 56, 57, 58, and 59 (?) and the Methodist minister put in charge there, as a compromise.

Other Obstacles. At present there is no uniformity in the procedure of conducting services adopted by the different ministers. Some like to be more formal than others. However, there is no conflict on that account at present, but there has been discussion among the ministers of appointing a worship committee to work out a uniform procedure for services within the Colony. Of the twelve accepted within the circle of the Ministerial Fellowship, one is Adjutant Matsushima from the Salvation Army, and two others are not ordained ministers. Hisashi Sano was the head of the Laymen's Christian Church, and there was some objection to accepting him as a minister. However, the argument that as head of a recognized sect he should be recognized on equal terms with others finally prevailed. John Fujimura had quit the ministry for some time, but was accepted by the Ministerial Fellowship because his services were needed by the Union Church. The English speaking reverends -- Rev. Kuroda, Rev. Kitagawa, and Rev. Tanabe -- get along very well among themselves, but the Issei reverends seem to have a more difficult time adjusting themselves to each other.

Ministers. The denominations of the various ministers are as follows:

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| Andrew Kuroda       | Methodist    |
| Yonosuke Sasaki     | Methodist    |
| Shigeo Tanabe       | Methodist    |
| Isamu Nakamura      | Presbyterian |
| Kensabura Igarashi  | Baptist      |
| Daisuke Kitagawa    | Episcopal    |
| Suenoshin Kawashima | Methodist    |
| Seiichi Niwa        | Methodist    |
| Isaac Inouye        | Methodist    |

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Adjutant Matsushima	Salvation Army
Hisashi Sano	Laymen's Christian Church
John S. Fijumura	Former Methodist and Baptist

Congregation. Rev. Kuroda estimated that there are 400 Isseis and 400 young people attending the morning services held throughout the Colony.

Role of the Christian Church Within the Community. Rev. Kuroda felt that the Christian Church had a definite role to play within the Japanese community. During the conversation it was brought out that Christians on the whole were more "progressive" and more Americanized. Also, there were a great many leaders among the Christians, while there were very few among the Buddhists. The Buddhists also tended to be backward and conservative. It was pointed out that Christians should serve as spearheads toward greater assimilation into the Caucasian world.

Miscellaneous. Rev. Kuroda seemed to lack confidence in the number of Christians in proportion to number of Buddhists. In his own community in Salem fifty per cent of the 150 Japanese were members of his church, which he felt was a very good percentage for a Japanese Christian Church. He was also proud of the fact that the Japanese and Caucasians maintained very good relations with each other.