

The Japanese Methodist Church

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Dear Friends:

On the eve of the Evacuation order, I greet you with mixed feelings.

Swift current of events following the outbreak of the present War have disrupted the lives of many of us. Undoubtedly some of these letters will not reach the destination because of the service of the addressees in the armed forces of the nation. I am confident, however, that under whatever circumstances you may be, you are being constructive and creative in a world of destruction and chaos.

These torments have also affected me greatly. I must state at the outset that they have not all been unmixed evil. As a minister of Christ, I have gained valuable experience and opportunities of service that will strengthen and make more effective my ministry. I am looking forward to a great deal more. But to the people whom I serve these months have been time of uncertainty, fear, and heartbreaking disappointments. Not that we have expected to lead normal lives but it was a blow to America-loving, peaceful permanent residents who have lived in America 30 to 50 years, to be suddenly classified as "enemy aliens" and receive treatment as such. The impact has been an especially hard one for the Nisei, the American Citizens of Japanese parentage. They were born in this country, were educated as Americans in public schools, colleges, universities and seminaries, and were thoroughly indoctrinated with the ideals of democracy and fair play. They have no home but this--no allegiance but the United States. Already over 5000 are in the U. S. Army. They have prized and have been proud of their citizenship, not unlike the Roman citizens of the days of St. Paul, especially because their parents were denied the privileges of naturalization and were discriminated greatly on that account. Suddenly they awoke on the morning of March 3, and discovered to their utter bewilderment, that their own government has classified them as class 3 "enemy aliens" ahead of German and Italian aliens. Restrictions swiftly followed. Proclamation of prohibited and restricted areas and other military areas, the restriction on travel to five miles, curfew between 8:00 p.m. and 6:00 a.m., prohibition against crossing the boundary between Area 1 and Area 2, freezing of voluntary evacuation and forced evacuation orders. Unless one is actually subject to the evacuation order, it is extremely difficult to imagine what it means to families to be evacuated en masse, to families average age of whose heads are about 61, who have lived in the locality for 25 to 50 years. This is not entirely unlike the evacuation of Polish Jews by the Nazi regime, only, ours is tinged with palliative, a bit of hypocritical humanitarianism (and thank God for that!)

As I go about busily (shall I say hectically?) engaged in welfare work among needy families; soliciting funds and food for welfare, understanding and aid from Caucasian friends; helping with registrations, disposal or storage of real and personal property; finding renters to houses and businesses; collecting junk; trying to preach to the being-disillusioned on the meaning of the cross; providing nurse and recreational facilities; and writing these letters and articles to widely and scattered friends (and forgetting about packing my things while going about urging others to do so in the face of imminent evacuation order); being restricted to five miles and having to be in at 8:00 p.m., I cannot believe that only short 3½ months I was traveling from one end of the continent to the other attending the National Conference of Methodist Students at Urbana and visiting many of you.

In all these days, the heart warming and encouraging experience in the midst of darkness have been your thoughtful letters and the sympathy and help of those Caucasian friends who have helped us unstintedly. The real meaning of friendship, and of the Christian fellowship that transcends the barriers of race and nations stand out in the clear-cut relief in these heart-breaking days.

Now I am about to be evacuated with 117,000 others--2/3 of whom are American citizen. (Do you realize this is clearly unconstitutional and is setting a dangerous precedent? We are not evacuated on the basis of nationality but on the basis of race. And some Negroes and Jewish persons are aware of it.) What the future holds for us is very uncertain, except for the definite knowledge that there will be untold suffering. But it is not the physical suffering that is the most difficult for us. We are willing to go a second mile in serving and suffering for our nation and for the principles of democracy and freedom for which she stands. But it is the feeling that we are men without country not by our choice but against our will by the decree of the Fourth Army. It is true that there may be some subversive elements in our racial minority--but these are certainly those in other groups and the F. B. I. is surely capable of coping with them. (That there were no sabotage by the Nisei in Honolulu was amply proved by the telegram to the Tolan Committee investigating defense emigration by the Chief of Police Gabrielson of Honolulu on March 14 and the report of the Asst. Secretary of War McCloy upon his return from a tour in Hawaii.)

However, when a feeling of being unjustly discriminated against is combined with physical hardship, it is next to unbearable. The Induction Centers where 3000 to 10,000 people will be housed and fed "temporarily", have been built in about a week to ten days. There must be about 15 to 20 of them, most of them in race tracks and county fairgrounds. Many of the more durable buildings are made-over stables. But the majority of them are rough frame structures 20' x 100' with small windows, tar paper-walls and roofs and asphalt floors! About five families will be housed in each. Imagine a typical Japanese family of 6 or 7 (not the average, because there are many newly weds and single men and women) living in a single room 20' x 20', in these shacks during the typical Fresno summer weather of 105° outside in shade--perhaps 125 inside (with asphalt floors!) No one knows where the people will be "relocated" from these centers. The Army has taken upon itself (or was forced by powerfully maneuvered minority "public" pressure) a task which is not its usual. The Army has done it as well as it may be expected, Milton Eisenhower is appointed by the President as the Chief of Wartime Relocation Authority. He can be depended upon to do the job right, but he is faced with almost insuperable difficulties.

I am to be evacuated and to enter into one of these concentration camps, for that is what they really are with double barbed fences and all. Only, families, men, women, children, sick, and invalid are to be placed in them. I shall probably be responsible to between 3000 and 5000 souls in one of these, perhaps at Fresno Fairgrounds. Many old people 65-75 will die. Many babies will be born and will die. (The largest group of Nisei is now 21) These are certainly no place for aged and the infants. Many will pass away more because of the loss of all that they have worked for in their life time and of lack of something to live for. I am to be their pastor, the minister of the gospel. How am I to preach to them? I do not ask in resentment or cynicism. This is not sour grapes--we do not produce anything but the sweetest grapes in Fresno. There is nothing in my heart but the feeling of responsibility and the task to be done. If I

fail, who will not make me feel that it is my providential opportunity to serve the people and the Master. I am very glad of the training I was given at Union Theological Seminary and through various conferences and seminars and tours. But more than ever before I feel humble in the face of the gigantic task. I need your help and your prayers.

I do not know when the evacuation order will be issued. The Wartime Civil Control Administration assures us that it is imminent. I have asked one of our local FOR persons to act as my secretary. Please address all correspondence to me in care of:

c/o Margaret Rohrer

Fresno, California

She will forward your mail to me, and if I am unable to answer immediately, or if "adressat unbekannt", she will so notify you.

"It is better to light a candle than to curse the darkness." Let us all endeavor, in the name of our Master, to do our bit for His Kingdom in these days of darkness.

Yours in fellowship,

Hideo Hashimoto

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P. S. Some of you may be wondering what you can do. There are many things that you can do.

1. Students: There will be from 2000 to 3000 American students of Japanese parentage who will be forced to discontinue their college and university studies because of the evacuation order. It would be very unfortunate if some of them could not continue. There are several committees, notably the administration of the University of California at Berkeley and Los Angeles; and the Committee on College Students Facing Evacuation, Joseph Conard, executive secretary, c/o Y.W.C.A., Allston Way and Union Street, Berkeley, California. If you are living in the middle-west or south (it would not be feasible east of Philadelphia), discover opportunities for these students in colleges and universities in your vicinity by discussing the problem with the administrations, with Student Christian Associations, Wesley Foundations, or other campus student centers. Be willing to sponsor one or more students, finding work opportunities, housing, and special financial aid for them. Then write to Joe Conard, send him a catalogue and he will give you further instructions as to procedure since the rules change from time to time. Please send carbon copies of all these letters to me. Dr. Hiel Bollinger is also working on this for the Methodist students.
2. Families: Make a census to survey and determine the possibility of relocating in your community families now in induction centers. Perhaps you can take a gardener, a truck farmer, or an optometrist. Let me know by writing to me in care of my secretary at the address given above.
3. Request copies of Dr. Galen M. Fisher's article in the "Christian Century" of April 1, 1942, entitled, "Our Japanese Refugees." (25-100 copies of this issue are available at 5¢ each.) Distribute copies to your friends or to members of your congregation. This article is the most comprehensive and clear-cut statement of the situation that I have read.
4. Continue to be the staunch and vigilant supporter of tolerance and Christian race relations in your own community. This dangerous precedent can easily be extended to other minority groups.