THE BUDDHIST CHURCH IN NEW DENVER

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Anthropology 100

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The Buddhist Church in New Denver was founded in 1943, by Sensuki Mori, Saburo Okada, and Tokimi Kiyono. It was built among the small shacks that housed the Japanese people living in an interment camp just outside of New Denver, a small village in the West Kootenay Mountains. The area chosen for this security camp was once filled with fruit trees, hence the name of this section of town, the 'Orchard'.

The Second World War was in progress when the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbour in December of 1941. Three months following the bombing, the Canadaian Federal Government began their campaign to relocate the Japanese who were living in the country. Their reason? Security. The majority of the Japanese living in Canada has settled along the coast of B.C., establishing themselves in fishing villages clustered on Vancouver Island, an area known as 'Little Tokyo'. When the Japanese began to shell the coast of B.C., there broke out an hysteria of mistrust against the Japanese in Canada. Demands were directed to the government for action against this threat. Many of the Japanese retained duel citizenship with Japan, although they were citizens in Canada. This triggered the fear of misplaced loyalty, which when brought up, was followed by the question of spies on Canadian land. It was feared that the Japanese on the coast would sabotage, signal Japanese subs, or smuggle spies ashore. At worst, it was feared that they might totally collaborate with the country of their origin against Canada.

As a result, the Kinsmen, Gyro Club, United Commercial Travellers, an organization called "Citizens Defense Committee,

and members of all political parties campaigned against the presence of the Japanese. They objected to the integration of Japanese in the predominantly white areas. The government reacted to the protest by announcing their policy of relocation of the Japanese into interrent camps. No distinction was made for the Japanese who were Canadian citizens and born in Canada, or those who were naturalized citizens of the country. Of the 22, 000 Japanese in Canada, three quarters of them were born in Canada, and 80% of the remaining were naturalized citizens. Fewer than 1500 of this total were Japanese naturals. The RCMP moved into the Japanese occupied areas, especially in 'Little Tokyo' and grouped them into the livestock buildings at the PNE grounds, which would serve as 'distribution centres'. The Federal government justified their actions as a necessity under the "War Measures Act", to give the Minister of Defense the power to "Control individuals of Japanese origin with respect to certain protected areas." (Star Weekly, December 4, 1971 - "No Anger, Not Anymore")

By the end of November, 1942, 21,070 Japanese were relocated throughout Canada. Some were sent to the sugar beet fields of Alberta and Manitoba. A few were sent to serve as maids or farm workers in Ontario, and fourty-two chose to return to Japan. The remaining, amounting to 11,600 men, women, and children, were scattered throughout the interior of B.C.

One thousand of these people were sent to a small town in the mountains of the West Kootenays, called New Denver. This spot was chosen because of it's high altitude, and proximity to mountains, making escape virtually impossible. The mountain

air was good therapy for the many Japanese who suffered from tuberculosis, and a sanitorium was built for the care of such patients. There was also an abundance of work for the Japanese when they got settled, and it was economically good for the town as well. The depression had never quite left this small mining community and it's surrounding villages, so the presence of people who would work for low wages would be a great asset. As Bert Herridge, the CCF member of the Provincial legislature at that time said, "They were economically good for the district." (Star Weekly, December 4, 1971 - "No Anger, Not Anymore"). The sawmills were busy once more, supplying the lumber for the typical interment camp home, with dimensions of 28' x 14'. The men were paid approximately 25¢ per hour for their work. This wage base was provided for, by the B.C. Security Commission (BCSC).

Now that it has been established how the Japanese came to New Denver, we can concentrate on the Buddhist Church and it's beginnings. The church was born amidst this time of fear and bitterness that finds itself in the minds of displaced and dishonoured people. At first, the church was intended to serve as a Bathhouse for the Japanese community in the Orchard, regardless of denomination. The overall population therefore requested permission from the BCSC to build the hall. The supervisor of that time, was a man by the name of Sawin, and on behalf of the Commission, he granted the Japanese permission to build the hall at a standard interment camp wage of 25¢ per hour, per worker. The Japanese, did not request additional financial aid, but through their own devotion of time and money, founded what would soon become the Buddhist Church of New Denver. Later on that year, the request came out that would change the Bathhouse into a Buddhist Church. Upon meeting together, the

Japanese realized that those who were Anglican or United could go to the churches uptown in New Denver, which were not segregated ~~at all~~. For the Buddhist however, this was not feasible, and since there was a Buddhist priest living in New Denver, it seemed only natural to convert the hall into a place of worship for the Buddhists. This was voted upon and after a special request to the BCSC, the official opening of the Buddhist Church was announced. The congregation at that time was large, numbering about 800 - 900 persons. The relationship between Buddhist and Christian Japanese was usually good, with the common understanding, that they were all of Japanese origin and they were all in a situation where they were considered enemies of their own country. At times however, there was evidence of dissension between these two religious factions. In her book, 'Child in a Prison Camp', Takashima writes about her mother's impatience with a Buddhist across the street from their home. The elderly Buddhist would sit outside his home, naked except for a waist cloth, pouring water from a dish, over his head while chanting a Buddhist prayer. This infuriated Takashima's mother who disliked when people displayed their religion in public. At one point, she considered reporting him to the RCMP. Despite occasional incidents such as this, it was recognized that for survival, all Japanese must co-operate, Buddhist or not.

The first Buddhist priest was Reverand Asaka who at the present time is residing in Japan. As an ordained Buddhist priest, he could conduct the monthly Sunday worship services, as well as regular Sunday School. Senya Mori, the most influential member of the Buddhist Church in New Denver today, received training as a special assistant in Vancouver from Reverend Okuda and

other Buddhist priests.

When the war was over, many of the Japanese returned to the coast and some went back to Japan. Those who remained in New Denver, carried on much as they did before, but the barrier between the whites across the bridge and the Japanese in the Orchard was being broken down. By the 1960's there was little prejudice surviving, and the Japanese and whites were integrating themselves in both sections of town.

The present day Buddhists who still support the church are all residing in the Orchard, except for Senya Mori who lives uptown in New Denver. They for the most part, live in their original homes, which have not changed much in the last 30 years. The numbers of the congregation have dwindled to about 20, not including those who travel from Salmo, Slocan, Nakusp and Kaslo to attend services. The services are only held about four times a year when the present priest, Reverend Fujikawa can travel from his home in Kelowna to conduct them. If he is unable to attend a scheduled meeting, Senya Mori, replaces him doing his best with the training he has. Reverend Fujikawa also serves Kamloops, Vernon, Midway, Greenwood, and New Denver, as well as his hometown of Kelowna. Senya Mori attributes the decreasing congregation to the lack of interest in religion of the younger generation. He feels that the Buddhist church is not the only church that is feeling this rejection. Many of the most avid supporters of the church in New Denver, have passed away. Despite this decreasing support in Buddhism, however, Reverend Fujikawa explains that the individual worship of the Buddhist is much more important than the church worship.

Each Buddhist, he explained, has a mini-shrine almost identical to the one in the church. Each day, the Buddhist worships alone, much as he would if he was being led by a priest. As Reverend Fujikawa said, "In Christianity, Sunday is a holy day, but in Buddhism, everyday is a holy day, whether you are in church or not."

Two weeks before I was to attend a special Buddhist ceremony, I visited with Senya Mori and interviewed him. He has known me all of my life, and was more than willing to help me out. He contributed more to the history of the church that I had already been researching, and then suggested that we go to the Buddhist Church. Inside I noted that it looked like a regular community hall, but the stage was partitioned off. Senya removed the partitions to reveal a beautiful shrine. I expressed my wonderment at what lay before my eyes ~~to Senya~~ to Senya. He explained to me that just as in all denominations, the new followers are trying to place less emphasis on decoration in places of worship. Such is the case with the new followers of Buddhism, but those who have been believers for a long time, understand the meaning of decoration. Beauty and decoration, he explained, stimulate the mind, and tend to hold your attention to what is being done and said during a service. We then went into a long room off to the side at the back of the church, and I saw that there were two wood stoves, a long table surrounded by about twenty chairs, and an old sink with one tap. I was then told that this is where they hold their luncheons, that follow all ceremonies. It is also used by the Japanese society during their functions. When the congregation was larger, the luncheons were

held in the larger area of the church, and elaborate Japanese dishes filled the tables. Since the congregation numbers have gone down, however, a light luncheon is served following the services. It is an opportune time for socializing.

With this background information in mind and a few hints of what to expect when I attended the ceremony which would take place on November 29, I awaited eagerly. The service was scheduled to begin at 2:00 p.m., and I arrived early enough to talk to Senya. He directed me to sit with Mrs. Takahara and Mrs. Kamagaya who would be my informants if needed. The ceremony was to be a combined one. As a tribute to St. Shinan and also as a remembrance day for all the deceased friends and family. Everyone began to get organized and it was evident that the men occupied one side of the church and the women the other. There were about ten women present that day, and only five men, not including Reverend Fujikawa. The women each held bracelets of crystal beads, with purple tassles hanging from them. The men's were similar, although their tassles were brown. Senya had two strands of beads and the tassles were also brown. Reverend Fujikawa's beads were the same except he had three larger strands and his tassles were white. These beads are much like Catholic rosaries and are looped over the hands during prayer. Reverand Fujikawa was adorned with a black robe, under which was a purple skirt, and over top of which was a beautiful sash-like garment called a Kesa. Purple is a colour frequently in evidence as the colour of the tassles, a banner over the shrine and the priest's skirt. The symbol for purple is celebration, in this case a celebration of St. Shinan's existence and the carrying on of life, despite

the loss of friends and relatives to death.

While preparations were being made to begin the service, I took note of all the ritual objects before my eyes. The most significant of these, as I was told later by Reverend Fujikawa, are the flowers, the incense, the food, the bell, and the candles. The main objective of Buddhists, explained Reverend Fujikawa, is to enlighten the senses and to see beauty in all things. Therefore, the above things, symbolize enlightenment of one form or another. Food, as well as being a tribute to Buddha is also an elightenment of the sense of taste, Flowers enlighten the eyes, incense, the nose, the bell, the ears, and the candle symbolizes the overall meaning of enlightenment.

There were three pictures done in woven silk on the wall behind the shrine table. On the left, was a descendant of St. Shinan, the founder of Shin Buddhism, approximately 750 years ago. This descendant symbolizes the belief that the leaders of Buddhism, follow a generation system. In the centre was Amida Buddha, the unHistorical prominent Buddha in the Jodoshinshu sect of Buddhism which the people in New Denver worship. He is not the original Buddha, but a descendant who 'enlightened' the older Buddhist belief. All other decorations present were made to enhance the beauty of the shrine, all made according to Sutra, the pure and beautiful. Another symbol which can further explain the emphasis placed on the search of beauty in all things is a picture of a lotus in the place of it's habitation, a muddy pond. Here is beauty amidst something that is looked upon as dirty and smelly. The implication is that there is beauty in all things, you simply have to look for it.

The ceremony is ready to begin. The Reverend can be seen standing off to the side on the stage. Senya stands, and in Japanese, makes an announcement after greeting the congregation. Everyone stands, and Mrs. Takahara takes her place at the organ in the corner. Everyone joins in the hymn, holding a book which is a combination prayer and song book. These books were given out previously by Mr. Oda. Of course they read from the back of the book to the front and the songs are printed in Japanese characters. The song is almost tuneless and is chanted more than sung. After it is finished Senya speaks once more to the now seated audience. He returns to his seat and the Reverend moves from his place near the corner of the stage and goes to a small table where he seats himself. Beside his table, is a ~~smaller~~ one upon which sits a bell. This bell, in the form of a bowl, is the symbol for the enlightenment of the ears. He prays, the rosary looped over his hands. While praying, he lifts his hands very close to his bowed face. He then rings the bell with a wooden pin shaped object. The ring of the bell is soft and pleasing to the ear. He now begins to chant, reading from the prayer book he holds in his hands. The voice is almost monotone, lifted only at the end of each stanza. The words seem to be very repetitious, and the tone rarely alters. After five minutes of this chanting, the Reverend begins singing, and everyone then joins in. This stops after another five minutes and the Reverend places his rosary over his hands and prays silently, lifting the book to his face after completion of the prayer. He then rings the bell again reciting alone, and everyone joins in soon after. While the Reverend recites and chants, Mr. Oda goes to the small table

in the centre of the stage area just below where it starts, and bowing first towards the shrine, takes some incense from a bowl, and after lifting it to his face, puts it in the incense burner, which is already ignited. He then bows once more and backs up before turning around to go to his seat. Mrs. Kamagaya repeats his procedure and then the chanting continues. The ritual just performed is a tribute to the deceased family and friends of the congregation. After about ten minutes of chanting, Senya stands and calls upon each person to come individually to the table and repeat the previous procedure, for their deceased family and friends. Following this ritual, another hymn is sung, and is once again previously announced by Senya. During this hymn, Mr. Oda goes up onto the stage, and bowing to the shrine, lights the candles. Another hymn is then sung, and the Reverend moves back into the corner of the stage. During the singing, he moves back to the shrine, bows and then seats himself at the table beside the bell.

After Mr. Oda returns to his seat, Senya moves away from the table to sit with the congregation. Reverend Fujikawa stands where Senya had been seated, at the larger table ajoining. He reads from a notebook in which he has written what he wants to say. The time is noted now, and it has been an hour since the beginning of the service. I am told that because of the double service, it will be lengthier than usual. The part of the service witnessed now, is the personal sermon between priest and congregation. It is the simplified way of learning about a religion. By relating Buddhism to their every day lives, Reverend Fujikawa is trying to appeal to them to obey the scriptures of Amida Buddha. Because of the many different

sects which make up the Buddhist religion, it is difficult to explain the beliefs that form their foundations. Reverend Fujikawa is a priest of Jōdoshinshu, in which Amida Buddha, the non-historical descendent of the original Buddha is worshipped. The sermon delivered by Reverend Fujikawa is light and airy now,and there is frequent laughter, and overall good response to the interaction between leader and follower. The priest uses hand and arm gestures economically, and his facial expression is almost always happy, a smile frequently adorning it.

When the Reverend concluded his sermon, he once again, lifted the prayer book to his bowed face and returned to the stage. This beautiful moment of total communication between the priest and his audience lasted for a full half an hour. Now, another hymn is sung, and on completion of it Mr. Oda, walks to the front, bows towards the shrine, and turns to face the people in the audience. Mrs. Takahara whispered to me that he was thanking all those who had come to the service, and invited those present to stay for a small luncheon. He then read a list of names of those who had donated money to the church. This money would be used for upkeep of the church and payment of the services of Reverend Fujikawa.

Two long tables were then set out, lengthwise in the hall. Plates of clams, oysters, Japanese radishes, and pastries were placed at intervals on the table. At each setting, a napkin and pair of chopsticks were placed. Cartons of pop, glasses, mugs, teapots, and bottles of Rye were set out also. When I noticed that Reverend Fujikawa was drinking rye, I must have shown the surprise on my face and he smiled. "In the Buddhist

religion this is considered to be the wine of life." Everyone began to chat in both English and Japanese. The conversation drifted from politics to education, and everyone had something to say about it. I noticed that the service wasn't mentioned. A rare chance for people with a common belief, to socialize, had begun!

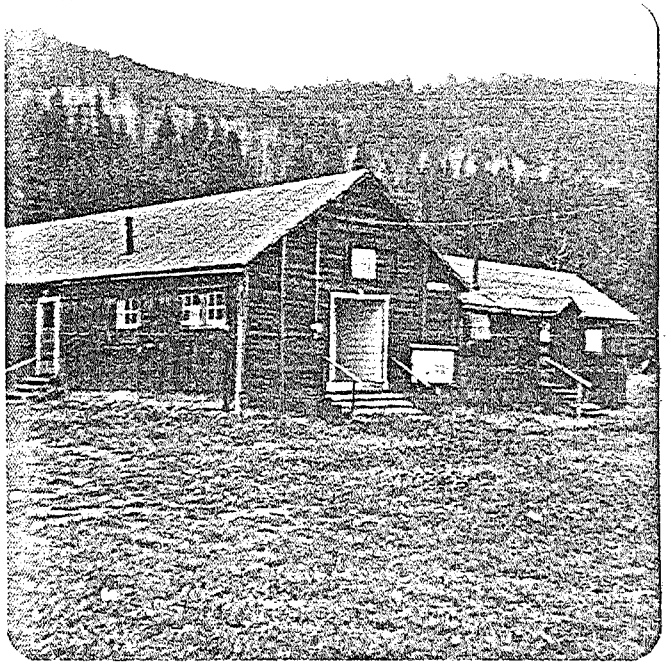
Although the church is regarded primarily as a Buddhist Church, the whole Japanese community may use it. The Japanese Society which is made up of both Buddhists and non-Buddhists meet there regularly to discuss the upkeep of the hall or to plan special events where the hall might be used. Japanese films are shown here and all members of the community attend. The society also meets in the hall to discuss their part in the annual Victoria Day Celebrations held in New Denver. They meet to plan the decoration of the float they will enter into the parade on this day, and usually make up the chow mein they will sell on the grounds, right there in the kitchen of the church. Showers, weddings, receptions, and funerals for Buddhists are all held here, and if non-Buddhists would like to use the church for their own shower, wedding, or funeral, and bring in a different minister, it is acceptable.

All of the above events have scheduled meetings before hand and the times and dates are printed in Japanese on the bulletin board in the Orchard as well as on the board in uptown New Denver. If necessary, the members are informed by phone. Usually however, the grapevine of the Orchard usually gets the word around.

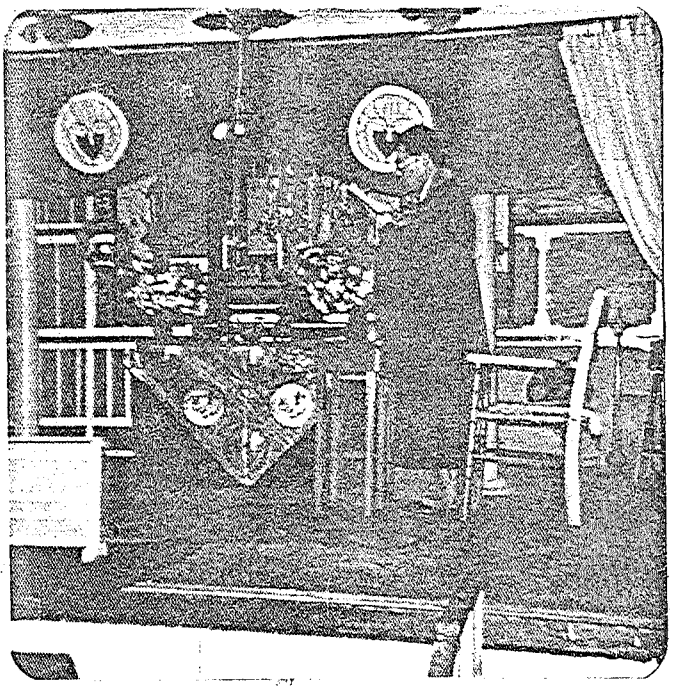
The Buddhist Church was never locked before, so that

any of those who wished to worship inside, could do so. However, the changing attitudes of people especially in the young generation have forced them to lock up their church. Senya does not understand this disrespect which seems to thrive in the young people of today. When he finds that some liquor or pop has been stolen from the cupboards in the church after it has been broken into, he questions whether the fall of religion, no matter what denomination, has any effect. Neither does he understand why so many turn their back on the church, leaving a congregation made up mainly of elderly people. I could not forget his words, and I reflected upon them for a long time. I suppose that Buddhists are lucky. Even if the church is lost, they still have their shrines at home. However, their is a great deal of pride which holds up the Buddhist Church in New Denver, and it will be sad to watch it die. Hopefully it will not be forgotten entirely, by anyone, whether Buddhist or not.

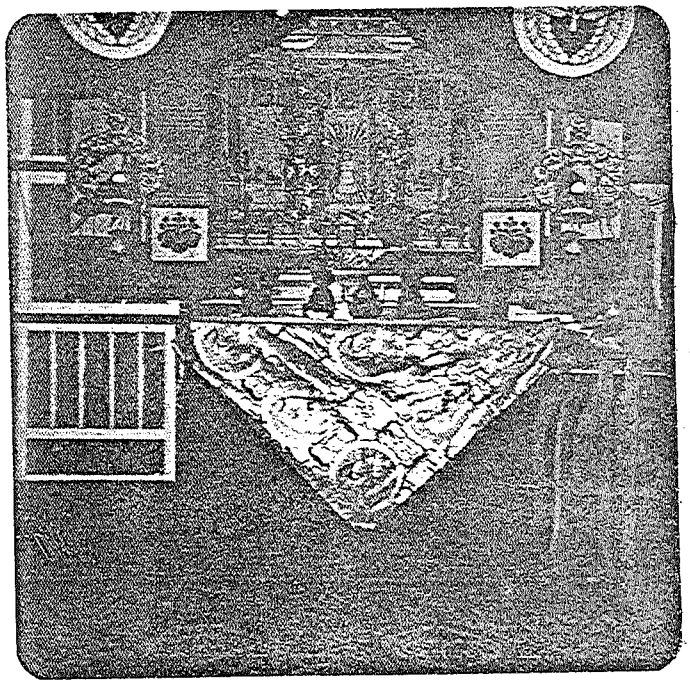
The Exterior of the Buddhist Church in New Denver, B.C.



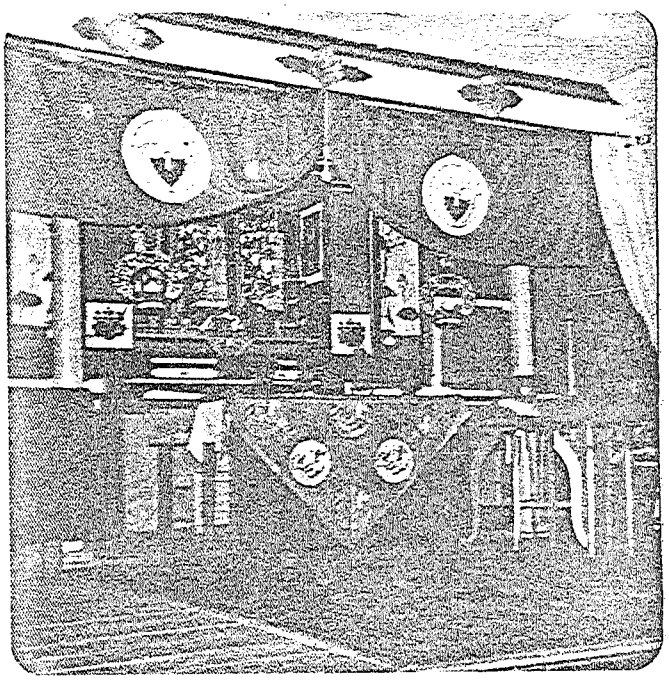
Another angle of the Buddhist Church in New Denver, B.C.

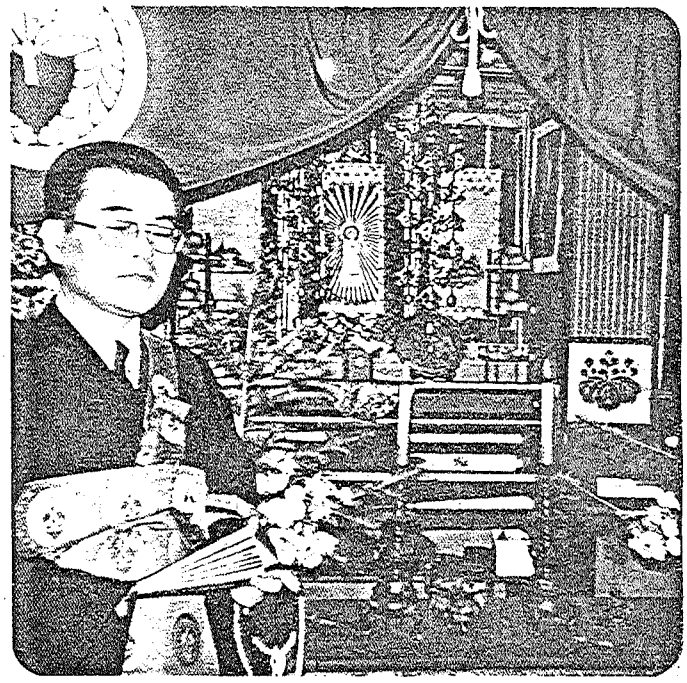


This is a picture of Reverend Fujikawa as he chants from his prayer book. As can be seen, he is just a short distance from the shrine.



In both of these pictures, the shrine is seen two weeks before the the actual service takes place. There is little decoration provided until the ceremony actually takes place. (a guide to the items present in these pictures is provided)





Reverend Fujikawa in front of the shrine.

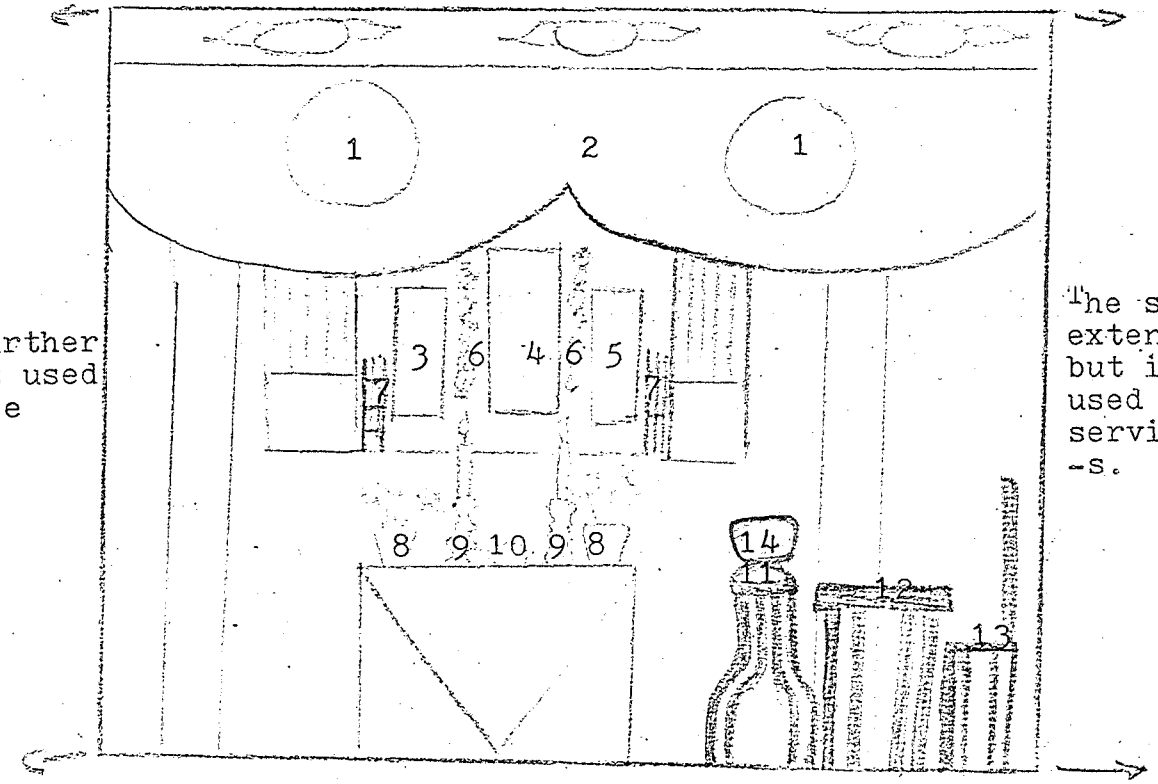
Reverend Fujikawa gives part of his sermon from this spot below the stage. He stands on the spot where Senya had been sitting for the most part of the service. On his wrist is his rosary beads.

Senya is introducting a hymn, his rosary on his hand also. He remained at this spot at all times except when the Reverend occupied it.

Following the service, I took this final picture of some of the congregation preparing for the luncheon. This is the main body of the church, with the chairs removed, so that tables could be set up.

The Most Important Items of the Shrine with Reference to the Pictures

The shrine extends further but is not used for service purposes.



The shrine extends further but is not used for service purpose-s.

1. These are the symbols of Jodoshinshu, or the emblems.

2. This is the banner which contains the emblem of Jodo-shinshu. It is purple, the colour symbolizing cele-bration.

3. This is the tapestry picture of the symbollic descendant, who is representative of the descendant system character-izing the order of Buddhist leaders.

4. This is the tapestry picture of the unhistorical but prominent Buddhist figure, Amida Buddha.

5. This is the tapestry picture of Saint Shinan.

6. These are dangling, decorative bell mobiles (not ritual except that they are another symbol of beauty of vision and hearing.

7. These are small three-tiered, orange, food holders. These carry the food offerings for Buddha, usually chocolate and Mandarin oranges.

8. These are the flowers which symbolize beauty for the eyes.

9. These are the candles, the symbols of enlightenment.

continued.....

10. This is the incense burner, which is the symbol for enlightenment of the sense of smell.

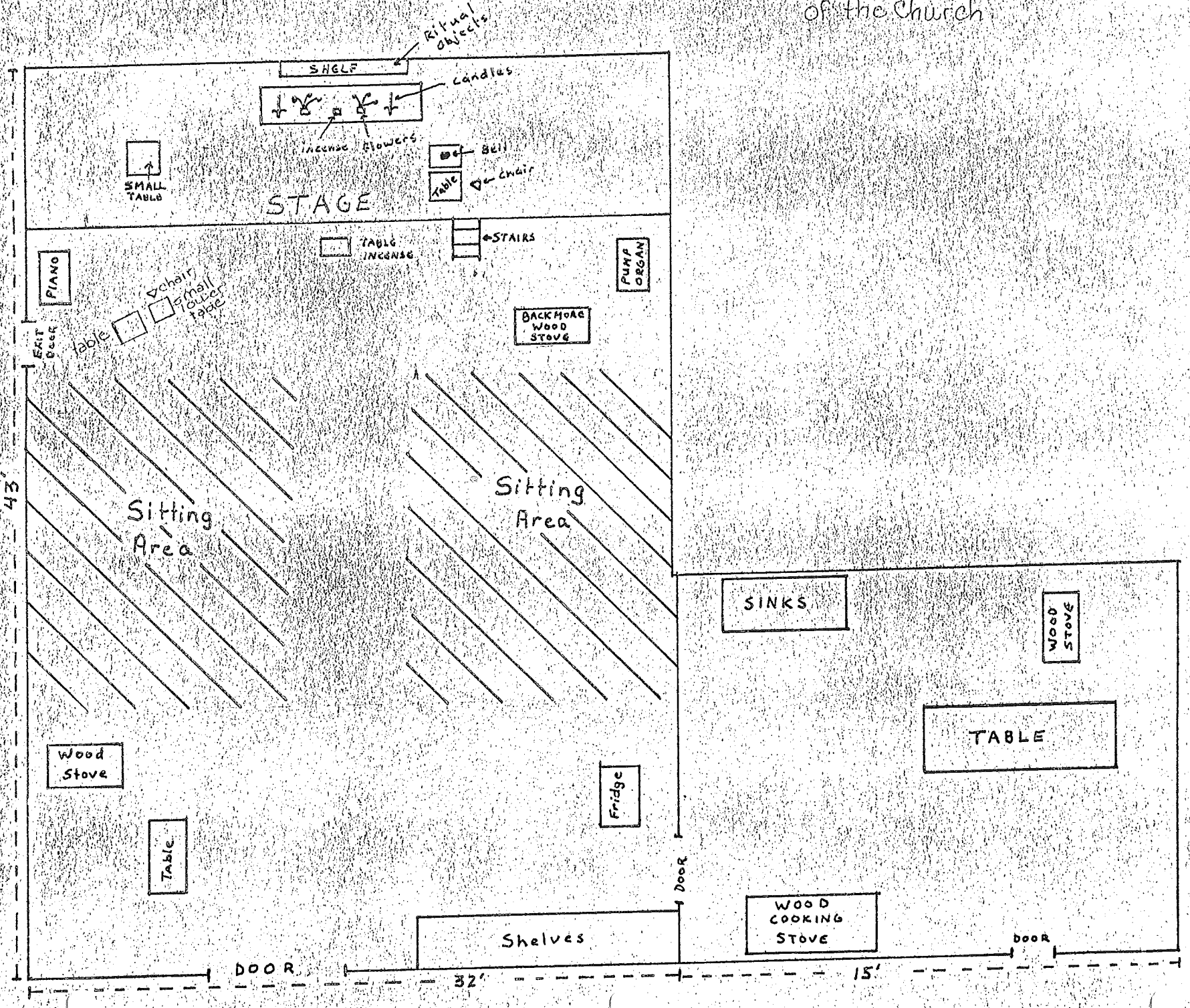
11. This is the stool which holds the bowl-shaped bell.

12. This is the table at which Reverend Fujikawa sits during most of the service.

13. This is Reverend Fujikawa's chair.

14. This is the bowl-shaped bell, which is the symbol of enlightenment for the sense of hearing.

Floor Plan of the E Side of the Church



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2. Mrs. Kamagaya - New Denver, B.C.
3. Mrs. Takahara - New Denver, B.C.
4. Shigaru Mori - New Denver, B.C.
5. Tad Mori - New Denver, B.C.
6. Reverend Fujikawa - Kelowna, B.C.

*A brief look at the sect of Buddhism practised in New Denver, Jodoshinshu.

Appendix A — Jōdoshinshū In a Nutshell

Jōdoshinshū was founded by Shinran Shōnin in Japan, about the year 1224. From a doctrinal point of view, it is very simple.

Hōzō Bosatsu (Dharmākara Boddhisattva, a Buddha-to-be) made 48 vows which he promised to fulfill before he would attain enlightenment and become Amida Buddha. From the Jōdoshinshū point of view, the most important is the 18th vow, which goes:

> *If, after I have attained Buddhahood, sentient beings in the ten quarters who with sincere mind, faith serene, desire birth in this country of mine, recite my name even (up to or down to) ten times; are not born there, may I not attain the highest enlightenment. Those who commit the five unpardonable transgressions and abuse the right dharma are excepted.*

The 18th Vow is called the "Causal Vow" because it is the cause for us sentient beings to be born in the Pure Land. It is also called the "Original Vow" because it is the most important of the 48 vows and contains everything in all the others.

"This country of mine" mentioned in this vow is the Pure Land, a perfect environment where we sentient beings in this imperfect world who have to work for a living, care for our parents and children,

* a section from the Jōdoshinshu Book, Nembutsu Press, L.A., USA (not copyrighted)

and do not have the leisure to go through the practices (such as described in section 22) required to attain enlightenment, will be able to work toward our enlightenment. Shinran Shōnin identified birth in this ideal environment for attaining enlightenment, with enlightenment itself.

The "my name" mentioned in the 18th Vow is *Namuamidabutsu,* which literally means "I rely on Amida Buddha." Reciting "my name" implies accepting Amida Buddha's 18th Vow as the cause of our birth in the Pure Land. The "name" given to "my name" is Nembutsu. To recite the Nembutsu, therefore, means to recite the name Namuamidabutsu.

According to the 18th Vow, then, those who recite Namuamidabutsu will gain birth in the Pure Land. The phrase "(up to or down to) ten times" means just once or an infinite number of times, i.e., the number of times does not matter.

From the wording of the vow, however, it seems that there are three conditions that must be met when we recite the Nembutsu:

- Sincere mind
- Faith serene
- Desire birth (in the Pure Land)

This has been the subject of much scholarly study within Jōdoshinshū. The conclusion that all scholars have come to is that these three "conditions" are all contained in "the mind of faith" *(shinjin).* This is

formulated in the *Anjnin Rondai* (Topics for Discussion Regarding Peace of Mind) as *sanshin isshin* (the three minds are really one).

The only requisite to birth in the Pure Land, then, is reciting the Nembutsu (Namuamidabutsu) with "the mind of faith."

As indicated in the Causal Vow, Hōzō Bosatsu said, "If . . . sentient beings . . . are not born (in the Pure Land) . . . may I not attain the highest enlightenment." Since all sentient beings have not been born in the Pure Land yet, can we say that Hōzō Bosatsu has become Amida Buddha (attained the highest enlightenment) yet?

Clearly Hōzō Bosatsu's enlightenment depends on the enlightenment of all sentient beings (from a Jōdoshinshū point of view, it depends on *my* attaining birth in the Pure Land). This is in the true Mahayana Buddhist tradition of sacrificing your own enlightenment for the sake of others.

The Jōdoshinshū interpretation of this part of the 18th Vow is that all the "conditions" for birth in the Pure Land have already been completed. There remains only our responsibility to have "sincere mind, serene faith, and desire birth" in the Pure Land. This is accomplished with the "mind of faith." *But the "mind of faith" is not something we use our will to attain; rather, it is that which is given to us by Amida Buddha.*

Our response to receiving the "mind of faith," is Namuamidabutsu.

The remaining point to be considered regarding the 18th Vow is the exclusion of those who commit the "five unpardonable transgressions," which are:

- Killing your father
- Killing your mother
- Killing an Arhat (a person enlightened through the Theravada teachings)
- Causing dissention in the Sangha
- Shedding the blood of a Buddha

According to Zendo, the Fifth Patriarch of Jōdoshinshū, this qualification is not a part of Hōzō Bosatsu's vow, but was added by the historical Shakamuni Buddha to discourage men from committing evil deeds.

The Jōdoshinshū interpretation of this qualification is that although the vow clearly states that those who commit any of the five "transgressions" will not gain birth in the Pure Land, Amida Buddha's compassion is so great he cannot help but work towards birth in the Pure Land of even those who have committed these evil deeds.

Just as a mother forgives her child who has disobeyed her, so Amida Buddha forgives those who do bad. *This does not mean, of course, that because Amida Buddha will forgive us, we should do bad things. As Shinran Shōnin has clearly pointed out, we should not take poison just because there is an antidote.*

The Jōdoshinshūist's response to receiving the "mind of faith" and realizing that Amida Buddha's compassion is directed even towards those who commit the "five unpardonable transgressions," cannot be other than *Namuamidabutsu.*

You may not feel the simplified outline of the Jōdoshinshū doctrine presented above is simple. Possibly not, especially when it is considered intellectually. But it *is* simple when you experience it. And that is the only importance of Jōdoshinshū doctrine.

There are certain things that cannot be fully expressed in words, yet which holds us and gives us sustenance, regardless of how long it is considered. Here is where the "religiousness" of Jōdoshinshū arises. This is the true use of doctrine in Jōdoshinshū. You must consider doctrine with your heart, and not with your mind.