

Memorabilia of 750th Memorial Service for Shinran Shonin
and the 14th World Buddhist Women's Convention
By Norman Hirohata-Goto, Co-chairman
of 2010 Honpa Hongwanji Mission of Hawaii
State Lay Association Convention

May 2011

It was destiny that I attended these events in Kyoto, Japan with the members of Jikoen Hongwanji tour group led by Rev. Shindo Nishiyama. My wife, Amy, first signed us up with the Hawaii Betsuin group that originally numbered 30 people. However, due to the tragic earthquake/tsunami/radiation plant disaster in eastern Japan on March 11, 2011, the Hawaii Betsuin group decided that it was not safe, nor appropriate to attend these events at this time, and decided to cancel their trip.

At first, I too, was hesitant to go to a World Buddhist Women's Convention with mostly women. But despite this recent tragedy, both the Honzan and the sponsor of the 14th BWA Convention decided to carry out their original plan to hold the Overseas Memorial Service on May 15th, and the 14th World Buddhist Women's Convention on May 16-17th.

My wife and I decided to support this long planned event. (As co-chair of last year's Lay Convention, my wish was to have as many people as possible attend our own convention). Because the Jikoen group was headed south to Kyushu and Okinawa after the Kyoto area, we decided to join this group.

I was very pleased to participate with the other 4,000 Jodo Shinshu members from all over Japan together with the contingent from Buddhist Churches of America, Canada and South America. Marching into the Goeido (Founder's Worship Hall) from the Amidado representing the Hawaii Betsuin and the State of Hawaii with many attendees from different parts of our world in this 750th Memorial Anniversary (once every 50 years event), and later chanting the Sutra in harmony with the thousands of attendees was awesome. The Memorial theme: "May peace and harmony prevail throughout the world" was deeply felt.

Being one of the few men (others were mostly ministers) attending the 14th World Buddhist Women's Convention with thousands of women was a worthwhile experience.

(My wife signed me up without my knowledge. The other few men that came with their wives went on a separate tour of Kyoto during the same time.)

In front of a huge audience, Lily Horio, representing Hawaii told her inspiring story of how her parents kept only Jikoen temple open during World War II. Our Hawaii BWA group led by Doris Oshiro entertained the audience with the hula rendition of the song "A-L-O-H-A." I think our hula dancers sparkled the program with their smiles and cheerfulness!

As we were leaving the Kyoto Pulse Plaza (Convention hall), the other attendees applauded our Hawaii group and treated us like celebrities. (I learned that Doris Oshiro was attending her 4th World BWA Convention and her second one in Kyoto). In addition we toured Honzan including Toyotomi Hideyoshi's gift of cultural treasures to the Honpa Hongwanji and other National Architectural Treasures: Shoin, Karmon and Hiunkaku.

Our tour of Kyoto, Kyushu and Okinawa was fun and memorable. Kyoto's: Mt. Hiei, Sanjusangen-do, Arashiyama; Kyushu's: Glover Garden, Nagasaki Peace Memorial Park and Museum, Unzendake Saigai Memorial Hall, and Rev. Nishiyama's family temple in Omuta in Fukuoka Prefecture; Okinawa's: Churaumi Aquarium, Okinawa Prefectural Peace Memorial Museum, Himeuri no To (Monument) and Museum, Shuri Castle.

If Rev. Nishiyama needs another job, he can apply to be a Japan tour guide. We learned of his many talents on this trip: singing, joking and giving Dharma talks every day.

We were an awesome group of fellow travelers. Just twelve "Daring Dozen" of us: Arlene Kawabata from Kamuela Hongwanji; Joyce Fujimoto (Rev. David Fujimoto's mother) from Wahiawa Hongwanji, Amy and me from Hawaii Betsuin, and Jikoen members: Lily Horio, Judy Muramoto, Doris Oshiro, June Nakamasu, June Sutterfield, Morris Moribe, Rev. Shindo Nishiyama, and tour guide Eizo Higashimoto from Kintetsu Hawaii. The women even entertained the owners and employees of several restaurants and onsens that we ate at with their wonderful hula.

My wife, Amy and I would like to thank Rev. Nishiyama and the entire Jikoen group for letting us join your tour on this most memorable journey! Arigatou gozaimasu.