

President's Report: 107th GISEIKAI
February 8-9, 2019

INTRODUCTION:

This is the last year of my last term in office. Based on my experiences over the last five years, I would like to share a plan to guide my last year and ask for your help in transforming these ideas into action.

FOCUS:

At this year's Giseikai, more than in any other year in my terms as president, finances will be the center of our attention. Given the fact that our temples' ability to pay their assessments are becoming more difficult because of their aging membership and given the fact that Hawaii Kyodan's yearly budget remains relatively stable year after year, there is an increasing distance developing between the need for money and the availability of money in our temples. If we carry on exactly as we are now for the next five to ten years, this increasing distance will stretch and challenge some of our temples to near breaking points, if not beyond their breaking points.

Even if we begin to do things differently starting from today, there are temples that will close within the next ten years. The demographics in their geographic areas will have a great deal to do with their closing. The leaders of these temples with the assistance from the Office of the Bishop and the Business Manager need to see life as it really is and prepare for the future that is to come. We, as Buddhists, should surely be prepared to accept the truth that nothing lives forever, and thus we need to prepare for what is to come in ways that not only address the needs of our faithful members but our organization as a whole. I call on temples to reflect on your futures and begin laying down realistic plans for dealing with what may come.

If we begin to do things differently starting from today, we will be able to sustain more of our temples and maybe even grow some of them. These are the opportunities within reach over the next year and beyond.

First, we must develop alternative revenue sources for our temples and for Hawaii Kyodan.

1. We must give our Land Evaluation Consultant a list of five parcels of high potential Hongwanji lands to begin evaluating immediately to determine what revenue-producing activities are legal and feasible on these lands. The temples whose lands we plan to evaluate should be informed by the end of this month so our Land Evaluation Consultant can begin his work.
2. We must be prepared to hire a consultant by the beginning of next year, who is experienced at handling business leases and land sales, to work with our Land Evaluation Consultant. Together they must frame recommendations for revenue-producing opportunities. These opportunities should be ready for the Board's consideration and action before the end of 2020.

3. We must help temples implement Planned Giving Programs immediately by making brochures and training available. Motivated temples should be engaged in active solicitation of planned gifts from their members by the end of 2019.
4. We must consider developing a major fundraising event for Hawaii Kyodan and report to the Board at its December 2019 meeting with consideration for launch in 2020. I believe the best opportunity for such a fundraising event is our annual Living Treasures Luncheon.

Second, we must base the cost of Hawaii Kyodan operations on what we can realistically afford. We must consider becoming a smaller, but more focused Hawaii Kyodan that provides services that impact our effectiveness in sharing the Dharma with responsive audiences in a warm and welcoming environment.

5. We must ask our Finance and Budget Committee to develop the 2020 budget on the actual revenues generated in 2019. Our spending must be driven by what we can afford. I am asking that the projected budget be ready for discussion at Hawaii Kyodan's 2019 May Board meeting.
 - a. Every committee, component, and department within Hawaii Kyodan will be required to assess the effectiveness of its operations and activities. We must continue to fund those activities that are essential to our effectiveness in sharing the Dharma, and we must end funding for activities that have minimal impact on our members and the wider community.

Third, we must pull together and support those ministers and lay members who are ready to actively implement propagation activities with audiences that have a high potential for engaging with the Dharma and joining our temples.

6. We must support the efforts of the Monshinto Task Force. I will say more about this later when we discuss the Budget, but just let me say here that this is a group of young leaders who will be developing practical ideas, resources, and practices for reaching out to, welcoming, and sharing the Dharma with the huge non-Hongwanji population that comes to our temples regularly for events, such as Obon and fundraising activities.
7. We must implement a Pilot Project before the end of this year in at least one temple located in a demographic-friendly district. The Pilot Project calls for the formation of a team consisting of a minister, tokudo recipients, ministers' assistants and/or selected lay members. This team shall build upon practices already proven to be successful in sharing the Dharma among non-Hongwanji audiences. This team must not only consider the successful efforts in place but also engage in innovative and creative efforts to grow the Hongwanji.
 - a. What this Pilot Project will do differently from previous propagation efforts is to focus a great deal of time and energy in engaging with audiences with whom we do not normally engage using approaches that we do not normally use. I expect that they will also implement recommendations made by the Monshinto Task Force among other creative endeavors.

8. We must implement a second Pilot Project by the end of this year in which volunteering temples work to establish “temples within temples.” This is a concept in which we focus on a group that is not being well-served currently in our temples by traditional practices, schedules, activities, messages, rituals and personnel. The temples piloting this project will center its energy on serving a designated population with shared demographics, interests, culture, social interests and communication styles. The millennials would be an example of such a population. The efforts to draw, organize, and serve this designated population in ways that respond effectively to their needs and lifestyle, just as they are, must come from a partnership of the resident minister and temple volunteers.
 - a. The concept of a “temple within a temple” may materialize as two or three distinctly different groups meeting at different times during the week to engage with the Dharma in ways that suit them and their interests and their lifestyles. Each group may be selective in their participation in temple activities.

NOTE: I suggest we fund these pilot projects by redirecting a portion of our Hawaii Kyodan educational resources to their creative efforts. The results of the Pilot Projects should be shared with all temples in 2020. Also it is important to note that the two pilot projects I just mentioned may require reassigning ministers’ time, responsibilities, and even pay and developing an active support group of volunteer members working in partnership with the ministers. Because these are small Pilot Projects that might involve only one or two ministers, I believe that it is a good way for exploring alternative ministerial roles and deployment other than the traditional role of Resident Ministers, which in many cases keep ministers from attending to underserved populations that could form the basis of growth for the Hongwanji.

Fourth, we must improve our infrastructure.

9. We must pass the By-Law changes that will be recommended by the Committee on Reorganization and the By-Laws Committee at the 2020 Giseikai to insure our governance structure has the capability and flexibility of making difficult, critical, and timely decisions that will affect the very existence of the Hongwanji in Hawaii.
10. We must improve our communication systems so every member has access to information about the vitality and energy of our organization and our teachings. We must help our members see beyond their temple walls. We must begin to inform our members that they are not alone in their challenges and in their joy of Namo Amida Butsu. We are strengthened; we can do more than we think we can, when we know that we are not alone. Enthusiasm, optimism, and understanding are spread through good communications.

These are actions that the Bishop and I would like to facilitate with your assistance during 2019. I would like to hear from temple members and ministers who are willing to step forward and become involved in any of the initiatives I have just mentioned. I want you to email me and let me know who you are. Go back to your districts and recruit members for any one of these initiatives.

I realize that there are other ideas out there that we need to identify and embrace. But it will take for us to be open to the needs and aspirations of the generations following us. We must be open to believing that the True Teachings can be shared in ways and words that Shinran never knew existed 800 years ago. Above all else it will take the state-wide Sangha coming together with a common purpose to participate in and support actions that make a difference. We each must do our part. Board members and Giseikai delegates must return to their Districts and to their temples and continuously share information so members will have a feeling that they all have an opportunity to participate in a spiritual movement that is larger than themselves and their temples.

Thank you for your work on behalf of Jodo Shinshu in Hawaii.

Submitted by:

Pieper J. Toyama, President