



GEDATSU COMPANION

GEDATSU CHURCH USA

www.gedatsu-usa.org

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

- 2 News and Announcements
- 3 COVID Response Team
Wednesday Evening Prayers
- 4 Gedatsu Q&A – Part 6
- 5 *Shinko* (Sincere Practice)
“Cognizance of the Divine Spirit”
- 6 Minister-trainee Mica Rodriguez
on “Learning Her New Role”
- 7 October Offerings

Gedatsu Kongo's
Thought for the Month

***“Whatever we see, hear
or experience is an expression of
Divine Love.”***

We naturally tend to see things
in a subjective light.

When things go smoothly, we
feel happy. But when something
unfavorable happens, our thinking
may sour.

We must realize that the sun
does not rotate for our own
convenience. When we experience
hard times, we should be aware that
we are still alive. We will then be
encouraged to live with hope.

We all have ups and downs in
life, but please remember that life's
difficulties are gifts from the Universal
Life that helps us grow.



UPDATE ON GEDATSU CHURCH ACTIVITIES

While our churches in Los Angeles and Sacramento remain closed because of the coronavirus pandemic, members can still stay connected with our Gedatsu faith and activities through a variety of ways, including online YouTube videos, live-streaming events and Zoom videoconferencing sessions. For example:

- December “Never Forgotten” Services (see page 2)
- Weekly Online Prayer Sessions (see page 3)
- Upcoming online programs and activities, announced in *IN TOUCH* and other email bulletins

Also, ministers are always available to support members and friends by phone, videoconferencing and other means for private consultations, family blessings and memorial services. To arrange a family memorial or ancestor service, contact your local church:

- Los Angeles Church: **Rev. Naoya Okano** (626) 288-1212
naoya_okano@gedatsu-usa.org
- Sacramento Spiritual Center: **Ms. Mica Rodriguez** (916) 363-6054
gedatsuchurchsac@gmail.com



*The officers, ministers and staff of Gedatsu Church extend
their warmest wishes to members, families and friends for
a happy and healthy holiday filled with peace, hope and joy.*



December “Never Forgotten” Memorial Services

“Never Forgotten” Memorial Services are held monthly at the Gedatsu Church to honor the memory of those who have passed away during that particular month. Because our churches are currently closed, our “Never Forgotten” services are video recorded and viewable at the time of each service on the Gedatsu YouTube site.

The Sacramento Spiritual Center will hold its “Never Forgotten” Memorial Service on **Sunday, December 6, at 10 a.m.**, honoring the souls of **Tomiji Nakayama, George Sekikawa, TokioTateishi, Tomota Tateishi, Kiyoshi Tateishi, Soshiro Hatae, Shizuye Kodani, Kazuo Ide, Kanzaburo Ide, Mariko (Mizumoto) Takemura, Dorothy Keiko (Takemura) Nakamoto, Kiichi Ogawa, Kimi Yamada, Eizan Kishida and Albert Ryoza Akiyama.**

The Los Angeles Church will hold its “Never Forgotten” Memorial Service on **Sunday, December 13, at 10 a.m.**, honoring the souls of **Yoshio Arakawa, Eiko Ishida, Junnosuke Ishida, Natsu Grace Kikuchi, Helen Akiko Matsumoto, Jonny Numata, Mitsuko Numata, Kou Helen Sakuma, Dale Smith, Chisayo Taniguchi, Goro Gary Tanji, Ruby Toshiko Tanji, Shiro Paul Tanji, Tomota Tateishi, Gary Chin Toy, Toru Toyama, Consuelo T. Castillo, Chizu Kitagawa, Tatsumi Matsuura, Shizuyo Mizutani, Donald Roy Omiya and Thomas Yasukiyo Sueyoshi.**



Request DVDs of Church Videos

If you, or someone you know, don't have access to a computer or internet or have no email address, you can still stay connected with Gedatsu and informed on church activities.

DVDs containing church videos and other online communications are available from your local church. To request DVDs, just contact:

- Los Angeles Church: **Rev. Naoya Okano**
(626) 288-1212 naoya_okano@gedatsu-usa.org
- Sacramento Spiritual Center: **Mica Rodriguez**
(916) 363-6054 gedatsuchurchsac@gmail.com

Renew Your Church Membership for 2021

Now is the time to renew your 2021 membership dues.

Annual Membership: Renewable annually

Individual \$45

Family \$70

Lifetime Membership: Pay your membership dues just once, instead of paying annually

Individual \$450

Family \$600

Pay Online or by Mail

- To pay online – by credit card or ACH/bank payment – go to the Members page on the church website at www.gedatsu-usa.
- Or mail your check – made payable to Gedatsu Church USA – to your nearest church branch.

Donate to the Gedatsu Kongo Appreciation Fund

The Gedatsu Church encourages you to become a donor to the Gedatsu Kongo Appreciation Fund, which allows members to demonstrate a higher level of commitment, appreciation and support for the church. Participation in the Fund requires an annual pledge of \$600 a year, which is in addition to the general membership dues. This \$600 may be paid in a single lump sum; two biannual payments of \$300; or 12 monthly installments of \$50. Donations to the Fund are tax deductible. If you would like to support the Gedatsu Kongo Appreciation Fund, complete and submit the application form that is available at your local church office.

Renew Your Holy Paper Plaques

Gedatsu Kongo left us a number of holy paper plaques for placement throughout the home for the protection of our dwellings and happiness of its inhabitants. The new year is the time to renew your holy paper plaques. See your local church branch for details on types of plaques and prices.

Return (or Keep) Your Old Holy Tea Plaques

If you ordered new holy tea plaques for the new year, the church urges you to give prayers of appreciation to your old plaques, wash and dry them thoroughly and return them to your local church. Because our churches are closed, you may mail them or keep them safely in your home until you can return them.

AROUND OUR CHURCH

COVID Response Team Steers Church during Pandemic

Organized in mid-March as COVID-19 burst into public awareness, the church's COVID Response Team has been meeting monthly via Zoom videoconferences. Its purpose: to safeguard the health and welfare of members by issuing guidance on health protocols; offer updated communications on services, activities and support; and provide critical direction and oversight to move the church forward during the pandemic and beyond. The Team is composed of officers from the Board of Directors and LA/Sacramento Regional Boards.



A recent COVID Response Team Zoom call included (from top, left to right) Joyce Reid, coordinator, Rev. Naoya Okano, Dave Ide, June Tanaka, Marie and Mark Ishida, Pam Shaklan, Jackson Ito, Joy Sebe, Sr. Rev. Akira Sebe, Jason Detwiler and JoAnn Shiroishi by phone. Other Team members: Mica Rodriguez, Rudy Tsujimura and Cookie Takara.

Join Our Wednesday Evening Prayer Sessions

Every Wednesday evening, join in a brief, informal prayer service at 8 p.m. (Pacific Time) via Zoom videoconferencing or phone. After participants join in, **Sr. Rev. Akira Sebe** leads the group in chanting the Heart Sutra three times.



The prayer sessions (usually lasting just 15 minutes) begin and end with lively and laughter-filled chats, as members delight in greeting and seeing each other.

Recent prayer-night Zoom participants included (from top, left to right) Sr. Rev. Sebe, Joy Sebe, Dave Ide, Nancy and John Horner, Pauline Tomita, Sally McSwain, Delphine Sebe, June Tanaka, Sherri Mullins and phone calls from Ritsuko Nakatani and Hatsuye Graham.

If you would like to join the prayer session, follow these instructions:

Via computer:

- First-time Zoom users: Go to: zoom.us and click on "Join a Meeting" and enter 891 8263 5066
- If you have used Zoom before, go to: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/89182635066>

Via phone: Dial (408) 638-0968. Enter 891 8263 5066

If you have any questions concerning the prayer session, contact **Joy Sebe** at joysebe@gmail.com or (510) 205-6602.

Members Help to Fight Hunger, Feed Hope

L.A. Church members (in photo, from left) Cookie and Fred Barthel and Kyoko and Larry Muronaka participate each weekend in the food pantry giveaway of St. Mark Catholic Church, supporting community families experiencing food scarcity and insecurity.

Says Cookie: "We give away food that local markets, bakeries and farmers would have thrown away – nourishing foods like Brussels sprouts, cauliflower, squash, green onions, potatoes, apples, milk, eggs, bread, chicken and canned and packaged goods. We are so grateful to help our brothers and sisters in need."



Gedatsu Q&A – Part 6

By Rev. Hisakazu Taki

Q *When we perform Amacha holy tea blessing, why do we chant the Heart Sutra (Hannya Shingyo)?*

A The Heart Sutra, or *Hannya Shingyo*, is one of the most popular Buddhist sutras. Although it is very short and easy to chant, the Heart Sutra contains every essential teaching of Buddhism. This is the reason why Master Gedatsu Kongo encouraged Gedatsu members to chant this sutra.

The Heart Sutra explains that everything in the universe is connected with each other. Nothing can exist by itself alone. We are all supported by others by receiving immeasurable blessings from them. Therefore, we should appreciate the blessings we receive from others and try to help others as a token of appreciation. This is the essential teaching of the Heart Sutra.

In the Gedatsu Prayer, we say: *“I shall reciprocate the profound and immeasurable blessings I receive from my country, my parents, my teachers, society, and all creation in the universe.”*

We should be aware that our existence is possible because of the profound and immeasurable blessings we receive from those elements in the universe.

When we perform holy tea blessing for ancestors and other spirits, we should be aware of the immeasurable blessings we receive from them first, and then we can express sincere gratitude for them. This is the reason why we chant the Heart Sutra when we perform holy tea blessing for ancestors and other spirits.

Q *Please explain the meaning of the Heart Sutra.*

A One of the most essential concepts in the Heart Sutra is *KU*, or emptiness, which means that nothing can exist by itself alone. Actually, everything in the universe exists in relationship with others. All things are mutually supportive. This is how we exist in the world.

Think about our existence today. We were born from our parents, and our parents were born from their parents, and so on. Our present existence is not possible without parents and ancestors. We exist here now because of our parents and ancestors.

We may be a wife or a husband, a mother or a father. But we cannot be a wife or husband without our spouse. We cannot be a parent without our children. The same is true in the relation between teacher and students, employer and employees, businessperson and customers, etc. We cannot exist by ourselves. Our existence is because of others.

We eat meals three times a day. One meal consists of countless living things. We sustain our lives due to their sacrifice. We also drink water, breathe the air, receive sunlight, etc., every day. Thus, we are supported by many people and various things in the world. Our existence is possible only in relation with all beings in the universe. Everything in the world is connected with each other. Nothing can exist by itself alone. This is what the Heart Sutra explains.

Q *Why do we always recite “Repentance” before chanting the Heart Sutra?*

A Our minds are like canvases, on which we have drawn various pictures of our thoughts and feelings through our experiences in life. Some of those mental images may be happy and positive, but some might be negative ones. Our ancestors also drew many pictures on their minds’ canvases generations after generations. We have inherited those canvases from them.

(Continued on back page)

SHINKO (Sincere Practice)

By Gedatsu Kongo

Translated by Rev. Hisakazu Taki

Cognizance of the Divine Spirit

It is difficult to confirm the existence of the Divine Spirit through the five sensory organs. In general, its existence remains just an accepted belief. In the same way that we accept that vitamin A is plentiful in foods but vitamin B is not, since we are unable to prove this for ourselves, we accept researchers' results as fact. If we can accept with complete faith, that is fine. However, those who cannot believe without proof must take every available step to confirm.

If, by chance, we encounter a mysterious phenomenon or miracle, or witness a spiritual medium, we generally accept the existence of spirits. Especially if we investigate spiritual phenomena, we may encounter various human spirits and even, on occasion, a divine entity.

However, the path to contacting the Divine Spirit as an object of faith, of course, must not be sought through curiosity or investigative research.

The correct moral way to address divinity is with sincerity and devotion. Spirits may be contacted through rites of purification, prayer for their repose, or through formal enshrinement. At other times, in moments of extreme distress when we may beseech God's aid – or on rare occasions when we are in a state of complete sincerity and simplicity – we may be unexpectedly blessed with the opportunity to perceive God.

Those who are sincere and simple-hearted are always together with God, and even unconsciously receive the Divine grace. But when we, who are ordinarily full of wrongful deeds and defiled, occasionally do come in contact with the Divine Spirit, we experience a sensation much like receiving an electric shock in the head. Or we are unable to prevent tears from flowing, as if our defilements were squeezed out of our body and soul. How gratifying to occasionally hear the gentle whisperings of God when we are in a state of tranquility and selflessness.

In fact, to actually perceive the existence of the Divine Spirit is the fundamental issue for our sincere faith and practice in life.

There are those who not only disbelieve in the Divine Spirit, but strongly deny it. They should not be merely dismissed with pity, as lacking affinity as sentient beings or spiritually blind. In certain instances, as an offender of a heavenly sin in obstructing God's Will, they must be chastised.

There are times when those who have no cognition of the Divine or a sense of belief solemnly attend funeral services and other religious ceremonies and display an attitude of reverence or decorous observance. When questioned, they invariably say it is the general custom, a matter of policy or necessary formality as a means of satisfying the feelings of themselves and others concerned. These, as a matter of social amenities, are the usual answers.

From the onset, such people do not know life after death, do not believe in the immortality of the spirit, and do not seek divine guidance. Therefore, they are uncertain and are wandering about in dismal and obscure perplexity. Unquestionably, they can never comprehend the true sense of belief.

(To be continued next month)



Minister-trainee Mica in her own words

Growing into and Learning Her New Role

*Based at the Sacramento Spiritual Center, **Mica Rodriguez** talks about her progress as she trains for her career in the ministry. She describes her daily responsibilities and duties, studying Gedatsu doctrine and practices, connecting with the congregation, and appreciating the importance of her future role.*

On daily structure and routine

When I arrive on the *Goreichi* grounds in the morning, I feel as if I were going home and greeting everyone. So, the first thing I do is say “good morning” (in Spanish, *saluda a tu familia*) and get connected in that way. That’s my focus as I do all the prep work and give offerings at the sanctuary altars and shrines as I walk the grounds.

Then I give the morning prayer. Although I’m all alone, I practice as if the congregation were present, which helps me build my confidence for when I will be leading others.

I perform *hiho* meditation for 11 minutes each day to ground me and to clear and focus my mind for the day’s work. Because I do a lot of Gedatsu doctrinal reading, *hiho* practice helps me to understand what I’ve been reading and to mentally formulate that material into relatable stories that might help others. And on a personal level, *hiho* meditation helps to calm any particular energies going on in my life.

I then perform holy tea blessing for the congregation. I keep my prayers general, knowing that the intelligent energy of the Universal Life Force will direct the blessings where need. I offer holy tea so that we can connect to our own love and compassion and strive to help each other shift to the path of peace.

At this present time in my training, I take about an hour or two each day to learn and practice the various traditional Buddhist rituals that are performed for funerals, ancestor blessings and other memorial services. **Rev. Naoya** has been instructing me in the formal protocols – such as the chanting of sutras, etiquettes and rites. As a Gedatsu minister, I know that members will one day rely on me to perform these services for them, so my goal is to master these rituals in order to gain their confidence and trust. This is very important to me.



Mica began her training under Rev. Kazuo Yamada earlier this year. Rev. Naoya (above) has been an instrumental in training Mica in various ministerial protocols and practices.

Later in the day, I manage the church business, checking emails, correspondence, calling members, and paying bills. I try to check in daily with **John Horner**, who caretakes the grounds, learning as much as I can about everything that’s needed to maintain *Goreichi*. Understanding its management strengthens my connection to this sacred place, empowering me to speak on its behalf.

On the importance of prayer

As part of my daily routine, I pray for the souls of all members enshrined in the Gedatsu Memorial Tower. I’m grateful that because I have experienced rough times in my life and have felt vulnerable, I am able to empathize more easily with these souls and appreciate the importance of each moment of their lives. As steward, I feel privileged to be in a position to offer prayers for them.

I feel closely connected with all these members, past and present, many of whom are pioneers of the church. Their personal stories and energies move through me and strengthen my ability to pray for them. I feel that my sincerity grants me favor with them, and they, in turn, help me with my work with the church.

Prayer was definitely part of my upbringing and training, especially in my teen years, when I was part of a native Aztec dance troop, in which dances and songs were considered a form of prayer that expressed one’s respect, appreciation and sincerity. So, when I came to Gedatsu and learned of Gedatsu Kongo’s sincerity and heart, I found the teaching went hand in hand with what I understood from my personal practice.

(Continued on page 7)

AROUND OUR CHURCH

(Her New Role – continued from page 6)

The type of prayer performed in Gedatsu has felt natural and intuitive for me from the start. I feel deeply aware of how prayer moves energy and helps to strengthen our personal will. I believe that *hiho* meditation and holy tea blessing are potent practices. When I perform them, I feel spiritually connected and guided. I understand why Gedatsu Kongo stressed these practices, because sincerity is at their root.

On the challenges of social distancing

Although restrictions on travel and in-person meetings definitely have impacted my training, at the same time, I'm grateful that this pandemic year has allowed me time to pause and think about what I need to do before I go further on my ministry path -- to learn pace, find balance, identify priorities, learn and develop "my voice" -- before I'm an ordained minister. I've been using this time to brainstorm on the things that are important for me to learn, familiarize myself with members and what we will be growing into together. I want to gain the trust of the community I will serve so that they will join me in that experiment.

For me personally, this is a time of self-growth. It's crucial to be willing to look at myself and put myself out there so that I can connect with people. Hopefully, when people hear about what I'm going through and feeling, they will trust me, and allow themselves to share and learn, heal and discover.

I don't want members to feel that I'm better or purer because I'm a minister, but it's only that I have decided as a career path to focus on understanding the Gedatsu doctrine and help others to understand it, too. In order to do that, I must be willing to open myself up to sharing my own experiences and learnings. I hope to show how Gedatsu has helped me . . . and how it can help them. That's the work I want to do here.



OCTOBER 2020 OFFERINGS

Northern California Total: \$1,242

General Donations: V. Matsuura, T. Wakabayashi, P. Harada, M. Rodriguez, M/M D. Tsuboi, M/M Detwiler/Sebe, M/M J. Horner, S. Nishino

Special Acknowledgments

H. Graham *Goreichi* Care Fund (\$500)
D. Harada Appreciation for Mary Harada

Southern California Total: \$2,660

General: M/M R. Allum, S. Kaku, M/M K. Kuritani, M/M T. Matsumoto, M/M V. Mizokami, T. Murakami, Y. Oishi, M. Okada, M/M N. Okano, A. Okimura, M/M P. Reid, De Shiroishi, F. Sueyoshi, N. Takara, M/M/ H. Tsujimura, M/M R. Tsujimura

Special Acknowledgments

J. Mah Remote pillow service for Tomoki Oyanagi
N. Burks One-year service for Takashi Okazaki
T. Okimura In memory: Mariko Michiuye / Grace Sato
E. Ogawa "Never Forgotten" for Peggy Ogawa
D. Mukai *Ujigami* livestream service
D. Shiroishi *Ujigami* livestream service

Online Donations: Total: \$375

General: N. Tsuboi, M/M P. Reid, H. Tsujimura

Special Acknowledgments

D. Ide October "Never Forgotten" service
D. Ide *Goreichi* maintenance fund
D. Ide Appreciation for *Ujigami* service

Note:

*Special Acknowledgments are listed for gifts \$100+
Dollar amounts are shown for gifts \$500+*

Donate, Pay Membership Dues Online

You can make donations to Gedatsu Church by using our convenient, easy and secure online site. Just go to the Give page – or the Members page to pay membership dues – at www.gedatsu-usa.org.

You can pay by credit card or ACH/bank payments. Email and printable receipts are automatically generated.



The *Gedatsu Companion* is published monthly for members like **JoAnn Kaku** of the L.A. Gedatsu Church. JoAnn and her sisters, **Sally Kaku** and **Linda Mahoney**, were introduced to Gedatsu over 60 years ago by their late mother, **Mitsuko Kaku**.

After a 40-year nursing career, mostly in nuclear medicine, JoAnn is now happily retired and enjoys reading and watching TV, movies and *anime*, “which I’ve been doing a lot of during the pandemic.” An avid sports fan, she misses going to hockey and baseball games. “And I miss seeing my friends at church. God willing, we’ll meet again sooner rather than later.”

Joyce Reid, Editor

Kiyoko Hirayama, Arlene Okimura, Photographers

Editorial contributors to this issue:

Cookie Barthel, Dave Ide, JoAnn Kaku, Rev. Naoya Okano,
Minister-trainee Mica Rodriguez, Joy Sebe, Rev. Hisakazu Taki

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(Gedatsu Q&A – continued from page 4)

When we draw a picture on a canvas, we should whitewash the canvas first. Otherwise old pictures on the canvas may disrupt the drawing of new pictures. Similarly, if we want to change our way of life and become happy, we have to cleanse our past to start afresh. We should apologize to the Universal Life Force and guardian angels for our negative attitude in the past and promise to live a positive life with appreciation.

This is why, before we chant the Heart Sutra, we should recite “Repentance,” as follows:

“For all the wrongful deeds I have committed in the past through greed, anger, and ignorance by the actions of my body, speech, and mind, I now most sincerely repent.”

As described above, the Heart Sutra explains that everything in the universe is connected with each other. Nothing can exist alone. Therefore, we should appreciate the immeasurable blessings we receive from everything and all people around us and help and support each other to live together. This is the essential teaching of the Heart Sutra.

There are two major purposes to recite the Heart Sutra. One is chanting for the Universal Life Force, guardian angels and Master Gedatsu Kongo. By chanting the Heart Sutra, we promise to live according to the teaching of the sutra. The other is chanting for ancestors and other spirits. We perform holy tea blessing for ancestors and other spirits together with chanting the Heart Sutra to express appreciation and gratitude for their blessings.

