**Timeline: Japanese Catholics in America** –Word count: 3,170

**Catholic Footprints in Feudal Japan**

Seeds of the Japanese Catholic community in America were sown by St. Francis Xavier, who landed

in Kagoshima on August 15, 1549. These were tumultuous times in Japanese history with civil wars, when

the emperor reigned without actual authority; shogun warriors vied for political power. Xavier’s

motivation was to convert the highest authority and rest of the population would follow. He was bitterly

disillusioned in 1551 to see Kyoto, the capital city, in ruins. Now convinced it was necessary to evan-

gelize China first since the cultural roots of Japan were to be sound in China “in order to evangelize

Japan. “\* He sailed with several Japanese converts to China the following year, became seriously ill

nearing South China and died on Dec. 3, 1552, on Sancian island. Despite hostility from Hideyoshi

and opposition of various Buddhist bonzes, the Jesuits continued their mission in friendly Bungo and

Yamaguchi from the 1550s. In 1584, Spanish Franciscan Friars and Augustinians from Manila began

to arrive in Nagasaki, Dominican followed. Missionaries dealt with and converted daimyos who sought

Western technology and trade. Peasants, estimated at “750,000 converts”\*\* by the early 1600s, liked the

human rights ideals of Catholicism. For fear missionaries could win over the feudal lords, Toyotomi

Hideyoshi ordered the execution of all Franciscans in Japan in 1596. Missionaries and converts in Kyoto

were arrested, paraded through streets of Kyoto and Osaka and after a long march to Nagasaki, 26 were

crucified on Feb. 4, 1597. The 26 Martyrs were beatified by Pope Urban VIII in 1627 and canonized by

Pope Pius IX in 1862. (\* Neil Fujita. *Japan’s Encounter with Christianity, the Catholic Mission in Pre-*

*Modern Japan*, \*\*1991.Boye de Mente. *Japan Encyclopedia*, 1995)

1549      Jesuit padre Francisco Xavier sets foot in Kagoshima, Japan.

1584 Jesuits send four Japanese as young envoys on behalf of Christian lords to visit the King of Spain-Portugal

and the Pope to arouse interest in their missions; Pope Gregory XIII met them Feb. 25, 1585; hundreds

came to Rome to see the youths from other side of the earth.

1587      Under Toyotomi Hideyoshi, Christian missionaries were placed under a ban, but allowed Spanish

Franciscans to stay, presumably for trade reasons.

1596 Fearful on Spanish Infiltration, Hideyoshi orders execution of Spanish Franciscans, after a Spanish ship,

*San Felipe* from Manila and bound for Acapulco, loaded with guns, cannons and ammunition, gold and

silver, was shipwrecked by a typhoon off Tosa, Japan.

1596        Twenty-six martyrs (six European missionaries, 20 Japanese followers) are crucified Fe. 4 in Nagasaki

1600 English pilot Will Adams on Dutch ship *Erasmus* is stranded off Bungo during an April storm, befriended

by Tokugawa Ieyasu for his shipbuilding skills and is engaged to build several ocean-going vessels. [The

Dutch and English, representing Protestant Europeans, established factories or trading posts in Hirado and

devoid of religious ties. With a wife in England yet forbidden to leave, Adams married a Japanese woman,

bore two children, known as Anjin (pilot) Miura, died in 1620 and buried near Yokosuka of today.]

1613     Under Ieyasu’s encouraging feudal lords to seek overseas trade, Lord Masamune Date of northern Japan

(Sendai) sends a trade embassy led by his retainer Hasekura Tsunenaga to Spain and Rome. [First Japanese

to set foot in America, the party landed in Acapulco in 1614. Hasekura was baptized in presence of King

Philip III in Madrid and honored by Pope Pual V in Rome. He returned to Japan in 1920, allowed to live in

retirement, having been spared by his master, who was following the Tokugawa edict of 1614 to eradicate Christianity.]

1617      Between 1617 and 1632, a total of 158 Japanese were executed at Nagasaki, some were beheaded rather than

being burned on the cross, some were tortured and died in prison. The Church has recognized them as

“Blessed,” the status prior to sainthood.

1620        Tokugawa Hidetada (II) imposes search and inquisition of Japanese Christians; they go underground, passing their faith orally for generations.

1633 Between 1633 and 1637, two Japanese Dominican preachers and a layman were hung in a pit head first and tortured to death in Nagasaki, bringing to a total of 29 Japanese saints.

1638 Persecutions of Christians continued; historically another 4,000 would be listed; 35,000 peasants revolted

against their lord and slain at Shimabara in 1638. [The daimyo was ordered to commit harakiri to warm other daimyo in the nation to treat peasants with care. What was a peasants’ revolt over excessive taxation and

quelled appeared as persecution as the peasants were Christian. Thus, some have classified the 35,000 dead

as martyrs. – Fujita, *Japan’s Encounter with Christianity*.]

1641         Tokugawa Iemitsu (III) closes Japan (Sakoku), limits trade to Dutch and Chinese isolation policy (Sakoku)

                 meant as total ban on Christianity.

1708 Jesuit Padre Gioyanni Sidotti, an Italian, arrives in Nagasaki, immediately confined dies in his cell in 1714.

1853      Commodore Perry negotiates U.S.-Japan treaty of commerce and amity.

1856 Tokugawa government concludes similar treaties with four Western powers: French, Great Britain, Netherlands and Russia, allowing worship by Europeans in their own churches in Japan.

1865      French priest Fr. Petitjean discovers descendants of hidden (Kakure) Japanese Christians in Nagasaki.

1873 Emperor Meiji drops Tokugawa’s anti-Christian policy as demanded by Western diplomats.

1889 New Meiji Constitution formally guarantees freedom of religion.

**The Father Breton Years (1912-1921)**

In Los Angeles, when Kumataro Hatakeyama, a Russo-Japanese War veteran working at a Spring

Street store near St. Vibiana’s Cathedral, wrote to his Bishop Berlioz of Hakodate whether it was possible

to confess his sins by registered mail, since there was no priest in the area who understood Japanese, and

be forgiven by mail to fulfill his Easter duties. Since the request was impossible, the Bishop promised to

send a Japanese-speaking priest.

1912   As promised by Bishop Berlioz, French priest Fr. Albert Breton, en route to Japan from London, arrives in

October and celebrated Christmas Mass, his homily delivered in Japanese at the Brownson House Chapel. Boyle

Heights.

1912 Bishop Berlioz also petitions Fr. James A. Walsh, founder of the Catholic Foreign Missions Society, just

organized in 1911 for help, later known as “Maryknoll” for its home base in Ossining, N.Y., sat on a knoll

overlooking the Hudson River.

1913 At request of Bishop Berlioz, he surveyed other Japanese communities in Vancouver, Canada; Seatlle, Portland,

Sacrament, San Francisco and San Diego and determined his mission should be in Los Angeles, where there

were 50 Japanese Catholics. Father Breton continued to say Mass at Brownson House for four years.

1914      Los Angeles Bishop Thomas J. Conaty, offers and dedicates the Bunker Hill House (707 W. 2nd St.) as St.

Francis Xavier Mission, serving as Father Breton’s residence, hotel and clubhouse for young Japanese men.

1914 Bishop Berlioz informs Bishop Conaty to keep Father Breton as he saw fit.

1915      Upon Father Breton’s request of co-worker, Fr. Emile Leger, for Visitation (Homon-kai) Sisters from

Kagoshima arrive to run a children’s nursery in a W. 23rd Street home (near Vermont Ave.) and a kindergarten

1919      St. Francis Xavier Mission moves to permanent quarters, known for decades as the Deaconess House and Annex, (226-228 S. Hewitt St.) Father Breton summons lay catechist Henry T. Yonai of Morioka to assist; his wife

and two children, Bernadette and Joseph, followed.

1920 As the mission expanded, Los Angeles Bishop John Cantwell (successor to Bishop Conaty) offers the Japanese nuns and their charges a study two-story mansion and carriage house (425 S. Boyle Ave.), as convent and orphanage. It assumed an affectionate name – Sister Home.

**Early years of Maryknoll-in-Los Angeles (1921-1941)**

Maryknoll’s “early years” can best be symbolized by a two-story school building on Hewitt Street

That was constructed in 1921 in Little Tokyo, then home to some 3,000 Japanese. Along with the 3-

“R’s” was a fourth “R”-religion with help from the pastor and the teaching of Japanese. Joining the

Priests and sisters were the Maryknoll Brothers, who did office work, drove and maintained the school

Buses and organized Scouting and other youth activities. When the third floor was added in 1929, it

Signaled the beginning of Maryknoll’s “golden year.”

1920 Four Maryknoll Sisters arrive in spring to work with Visitation Sisters. Father Breton had asked the Catholic Foreign Mission Society (Maryknoll), founded in 1911 at Ossining, N.Y., to continue his work, after

Maryknoll received assurance from the Holy See that Los Angeles mission was “a stepping stone” to preach in Japan. (Permission was granted in 1933.)

1920 Fr. George Staub arrives as first Maryknoll priest in charge of Japanese work in Los Angeles.

1921      After nine years, Father Breton returns in June to parish in Morioka, Japan. Visitation Sisters follow, last two

of ten Sisters leave in 1925; one remains (Sister Mary Anna Akashi) to join Maryknoll.

1921 Fr. William Kress, pastor and Maryknoll superior for West Coast, builds two-story school (226 S. Hewitt),

for Japanese Americans, replacing wooden structures; Maryknoll Brothers arrive.

1923 In July, Bishop Berlioz of Hakodate visits Maryknoll Scholl in America rasing funds to rebuild part of his

Cathedral destroyed in a fire caused by an earthquake.

1924 Archbishop Fumasoni Biondi, papal nuncio, attendes Tokyo newspaper-sponsored reception at Maryknoll School to acknowledge America’s immediate response and generous aid to victims of disastrous Sept. 1 earthquake.

1924 Maryknoll Boy Scout Troop 145 founded, meeting at Sister Home through 1932, at Hewitt Street thereafter.

1926      First Maryknoll School class of eighth graders (George Kurata , Joseph Takeuchi) graduate.

1927      Father Kress and Brother Philip embark for Honolulu to establish Maryknoll-in-Hawaii.

**Father Lavery’s Legacy of 30 Years (1927-1956)**

These are the years when Little Tokyo recognized the “infinite patience and transcending

Compassion of Father Lavery and his associates for the Japanese people triumphed,”\* notably in wartime

America during the utter confusion before the Evacuation of 1942. He was the lone ray of hope for them

At a time when a non-Japanese passionately interested in their welfare conferred with Army officials and

Learned there was no alternative of Japanese remaining within the prescribed military zone. [\* *Manzanar*

*Free Press* editorial, May 29, 1943.]

1927 Fr. Hugh Lavery arrives to head Maryknoll-in-Los Angeles.

1929      Third floor added to Maryknoll School as student-body enrollment nears 400.

1930     Maryknoll Sisters acquire sanitarium in Monrovia to nurse Japanese afflicted with tuberculosis. Donation of $10,000 from Catholic Issei physician Dr. Daishiro Kuroiwa made acquisition possible; 1959 sanitarium updated to a hospital to treat lung-thoracic diseases; as need fell and unable to sell the property in 1968, the Sisters convert the facility to their retirement home.

1938 Father Lavery acquires adjacent property for a church, rectory, auditorium, clubhouse and playground. Sunday Masses had been celebrated on the ground floor (kindergarten) of the old school building; residence for priests was across the street from the Sisters Home on Boyle Avenue.

1939 Now Archbishop Cantwell dedicates the new church, St. Francis Xavier Chapel.

1940 Because of military pressure that Christian institutions headed by non-indigenous priests-ministers to be

Japanese natinals, Maryknoll headquarters asks Father Lavery for tips and names of influential Japanese in

Japan “whom you think would be helpful for us to see”\* regarding impact of the recent Japanese law. \*R.J.C. Butow, *The John Doe Associates: Backdoor Diplomacy for peace 1941*], (1974).

1941 With attack on Pearl Harbor, Congress declares was on Japan on Dec. 8; Father Lavery is most guarded about

the welfare of his flock and the Japanese community-at-large.

1942     On February 19, President Roosevelt issues Executive Order 9066, authorizing military zones and exclusion of “any and all persons” from these areas, resulting in evacuation of 120,000 Japanese (70% being U.S.-born

citizens) and internment in concentration camps for duration of was (1942-1945).

1942 Overflow turnout of 1,500 Issei and Nisei meet at Maryknoll Auditorium to ponder their future as the Army orders the removal of all persons of Japanese ancestry within 100 miles from West Coast shores.

1942 In March, Gen. DeWitt rejects voluntary plans of Maryknoll Father to organize a temporary refuge for Japanese Los Angeles area Japanese families in Missouri, over 24,000 had signed to join the project.

1942 Aware of Maryknoll’s tabulation, Father Lavery answers DeWitt’s request to gather volunteers to assist Army process Japanese at Owens Valley reception center at Manzanar. On March 21, 86 Maryknollers depart with Army escort for Manzanar to assist intake of evacuees.

1942 Maryknoll School “accelerates” graduation of the Class of 1942, presenting ninth-grade diplomas at Easter Sunday or maligning them to graduates already in the camps.

1942 Father Lavery organizes Catholic services with Japanese-speaking Maryknoll priests repatriated from Japan to minister and work with Japanese interned at nine of the ten “relocation camps. Father William Stoecke of the Society of the Divine Word, pastor of the Japanese mission in San Francisco, accompanied his flock to the

tenth camps(Topaz, Utah).

1942 Feeling Maryknoll’s work with Japanese is finished, school becomes St. Vibiana’s junior high school.

1943 Maryknoll parishioner Ryozo Peter Kado of Santa Monica completes construction of two Army sentry posts

with rock and concrete to entrance at Manzanar and the while monument at the cemetery. [In 1999, Manzanar is designated a National Historic Site with an interpretive center maintained by the U.S. National Park Service.]

1944 Bro. Theophane Walsh [1904-1981], with blessings of Chicago Auxiliary Bishop Bernard Sheil, opens CYO

Nisei Center (1110 N. La Salle St.) to assists evacuees find jobs and housing. [In 1948, Chicago Resettlers Committee carries on as CYO closes with Brother Theophane assigned to Maryknoll-in-Tokyo.]

1945 Manzanar High School graduate (’45) Bryce Nishimura enters Maryknoll Society, ordained priest in 1956, assigned to Maryknoll missions in Japan, a term as pastor at Maryknoll-in-Los Angeles in the 1970s and back to Japan after 1982.

1945 Maryknoll School graduate in 1933 George Minamiki [1920-2002] and summa cum laude graduate from Loyola

University (’40) enters the Society of Jesus, ordained priest in 1954, was a missionary in Japan for 30 years then pursued his doctorate on liturgy and taught Japanese language and cultures at the University of Notre Dame.

He is author of *The Chinese Rites Controversy: From Its Beginnings to Modern Times* (1985), written to mark

the 400th anniversary of the arrival of Jesuits in China in 1598 and with respect to impact of Shintoism upon Japanese Catholics in modern times.

1945 Army revokes West Coast exclusion of Japanese as of Dec. 31; Father Lavery welcome back and assists

returning evacuees from the camps and points east. (Note: Japan had surrendered on Sept. 2.)

1949 Maryknoll ordains its first Japanese American priest, a Kibei from Seattle, Fr. James Tokuhisa [1910-1979],

who spends 30 years in Japan. In 1953, after heroic efforts organizing work crew to rescue inhabitants from

their village doomed by a Kyoto flood, he refused an official decoration for his role in saving 170 lives. He said, “It was my duty to save lives.”

1949 Starting with 3rd grade at the top, Maryknoll School reopens for Japanese community; first postwar class of 16 eight graders graduate in 1954.

1953 Fr. Thomas “Watson” Takahashi [1919-1989], who started as a kindergarner at Maryknoll School in 1925, is ordained a Maryknoll priest, served continuously for 36 years in Kyoto Archdiocese.

1956 Transferred to New Orleans, Father Lavery [1895-1970] culminates 30-year ministry among West Coast

Japanese; his “unselfish contribution and unwavering service” in the Japanese American community is recognized by Japanese government with the Emperor’s Order of the Sacred Treasure, 5th Class, in 1966.

1957 Father Michael McKillop is recalled from Japan to head Marykoll-in-Los Angeles.

**Maryknoll’s School Half of the 20th Century (1960-2000)**

The last half of the 20th Century for Maryknoll-in-Los Angeles wrought the departure of the

Maryknoll Fathers, Brothers and Sisters but name, “Maryknoll,” continues to shine in Little Tokyo.

1960 Taking advice from Cardinal James McIntyre not to reinforce school building to new earthquake code; Father McKillop undertakes campaign to build new school building.

1963 Ground broken in November for new school; six month later, 413 children march into a two-story L-shaped structure designed and built by O’Leary and Terasawa, architects.

1964 Old school building demolished; empty lot paved as school playground and for a weekend parking lot.

1964 Maryknoll curate Father Clement Boesflug honored as JACLer of the Biennium for outstanding service to Nisei community while serving as Downtown L.A. JACL Chapter president in 1963 and since 1954 as unofficial National JACL chaplain.

1968 Father Clarence Witte succeed as pastor; parents learn Maryknoll Fathers plan to shut down school because of expenses, but the financial success of the annual three-day school carnivals delays decision until 1995.

1975 Cardinal Timothy Manning ordains San Francisco-born Nisei, Art Hiraga, permanent deacon from the first class for Los Angeles Archdiocese.

1985 Bro. Pierre, best remembered in the 1970s when he drove the school bus and coached athletics, returned to study for the priesthood at Maryknoll-on-the-Hudson; ordained in June, 1985, Fr. Joseph “Jose” Hamel served at Maryknoll’s *highest* mission, geographically, in Peru in Puno for 15 years. In 1990, he was reassigned to Japan to minister to “Nikkei d*ekasegi* from South America in Japan.

1987 Maryknoll-in-Los Angeles celebrates its 75th anniversary; Cardinal Timothy Manning celebrates with solemn Mass Aug/ 15 at St. Vibiana Cathedral.

1994 In wake of dwindling student enrollment from parish, Maryknoll School to close at end of 1995 school year.

1995 Fr. Joseph Klecha, MM, Maryknoll’s last pastor, organizes pastoral team to prepare Japanese American

Catholic Community of Faith for the new millennium.

1995 On Sept. 24, Cardinal Roger Mahony by blesses parish and as “Maryknoll Japanese Catholic Center, MJCC”, calls St. Francis Xavier Chapel “the most important beacon of our Faith for the newly arrived people in our midst.”

1996 Tokyo Cardinal Peter Shirayanagi visits Sept. 22-23 to celebrate MJCC’s first anniversary.

1997 Fr. Henry Mair and Fr. David Doerner, of the Society of Atonement, respond to MJCC’s needs for Japanese- speaking priests and take up residence and pastoral duties at 222 S. Hewitt St.

1998 Pope John Paul II enrolls two Maryknollers, George Takahashi and Bernadette Yonai Nishimura, into the Papal Order of St. Gregory, recognizing their service to community, church and the Holy See.

2003 Work of the Maryknoll Fathers in the WW2 Japanese camps is recorded in a California state-funded project, “Beyond Faith: the Role of the Japanese American Church and Temple in the Japanese American Community” at the Japanese American Cultural & Community Center. Sister Joanne Doi, MM, relates the Maryknoll story.

**Prepared for Maryknoll Japanese Catholic Center / Henry K. Honda ■**