



Honpa Hongwanji Mission of Hawaii

HEADQUARTERS UPDATE

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September 2024

MESSAGE FROM THE BISHOP

**Bishop Toshiyuki Umitani delivered the following message at the Hawaii Kyodan Board of Directors Meeting on September 14, 2024.*

“ACHIEVING THE GOAL TOGETHER”

“The mission of Honpa Hongwanji Mission of Hawaii is to share the living teachings of Jodo Shinshu Buddhism so that all beings may enjoy lives of harmony, peace, and gratitude.”

The teachings of the Nembutsu hold a profound power—the power to transform our ordinary existence into something extraordinary. Jodo Shinshu reminds us that within the all-encompassing Wisdom and Compassion of Amida Buddha, every life—yours, mine, and all others—is equally valued, affirmed, and cherished.

In these challenging times, the message of Jodo Shinshu is more important than ever. It offers us a path to a more harmonious and compassionate society. But our mission cannot be achieved in isolation—it requires the collective effort of all of us. Together, we have the power to create a positive impact on individuals and the world.

Currently, we have approximately 3,700 member families devoted to the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha. Some, like you, are actively involved in managing the temple’s businesses and activities.

Additionally, there are others—whom I call ‘affiliates’—who may not be formal members but who support the temple during key events, like bon dances. While we don’t have official numbers, I estimate there are about 12,000 affiliates.

Our current propagation efforts largely focus on these groups—members and affiliates. However, our reach can go much further. A recent survey shows that many people have a personal interest in Buddhism, even though they are not connected to any specific organization. Roughly 5% of Hawaii’s population identifies as Buddhist, which is about 70,000 people.

But beyond this, we have an even greater opportunity. Approximately 67% of Hawaii’s adult population—around 700,000 people—express an interest in spirituality, even though they don’t identify as Buddhist.

I believe now is the time for us to broaden our horizon and reach out beyond our immediate temple communities. The message of Jodo Shinshu has the potential to resonate with many more people.

As Bishop and as the BSC Interim Director, I have shared these statistics with the BSC Committee, the Commission on Buddhist Education, and the Ministerial Training Committee. I’ve stressed that, for the future survival and growth of Hawaii Kyodan, we need to engage the broader community. I deeply appreciate those committee members who have already begun to review their programs and activities with this broader market in mind.

But the responsibility of propagation does not rest solely on our ministers or certain committees. It must be a team effort, a collective responsibility. Each one of us—whether a minister, temple president, member, or board member—has a crucial role to play in spreading the Nembutsu teaching.

Let me share an analogy: think of a café, such as Starbucks. The mission of Starbucks is to inspire and nurture the human spirit—one person, one cup, and one neighborhood at a time. People go to Starbucks not just for the coffee but for the entire experience. The coffee may be excellent, but what keeps people coming back is the warm, welcoming atmosphere—the sense of belonging they feel as soon as they step through the door.

A successful café offers more than just a product. It provides a space where people can relax, connect, and enjoy a pleasant environment. And it's not only the baristas who are responsible for this. Many workers, departments, HQ, and the entire organization work together to create this positive customer experience.

In the same way, our temples should function. The Buddha's teachings are like the coffee in a café—they are at the heart of what we offer. Ministers, like baristas, are at the forefront, sharing the Dharma. But just as a café requires more than its baristas to create a welcoming environment, our temples require more than just the ministers. It takes all of us, working together, to create a space where people can feel at home, build connections, and leave the temple feeling spiritually fulfilled.

We all carry the "brand" of our mission on our shoulders. As ministers, members, and leaders of the Honpa Hongwanji Mission of Hawaii, every interaction—whether inside the temple or in the broader community—reflects our values and the Buddha's teachings. Each of us helps shape the identity of our organization. Together, we create a lasting impact on those who come into contact with us.

As our Kyodan faces declining membership and a shrinking pool of leadership, working together becomes even more critical. By uniting our efforts, we can achieve far more than any one of us can achieve alone.

So, I ask you: How can you, as an individual, a temple, or a committee, contribute to this collaborative effort to share the Nembutsu? I deeply appreciate your tireless dedication to this mission. But I invite you to reflect on this question—either on your own, with your temple members, or with your committee members.

Remember, we are all carrying the "brand" of Hongwanji. Every effort, no matter how small, contributes to the greater mission. And these efforts must be recognized, shared, and communicated effectively.

Let us recommit ourselves to the mission, to one another, and to those who are waiting to hear the timeless message of Shinran Shonin. Together, we will continue to spread the joy of living in the Nembutsu.

Namo Amida Butsu.

Toshiyuki Umitani, Bishop

CONDOLENCE

Mr. Bruce Yoshiyuki Shimada, a member of Waialua Hongwanji Mission, passed away on March 11, 2024. Mr. Shimada dedicated his life to fostering a warm atmosphere for the Sangha members of the Waialua Hongwanji as its secretary and editor of the temple newsletter. Bishop Toshiyuki Umitani presented the Posthumous Title (INGO) of **FU-SHO-IN 普照院**, which signifies the Light of the Buddha that “completely illuminates” the boundless worlds, at the Funeral Service held on September 12, 2024.

ENCOURAGING PARTICIPATION IN VOTING COMMITTEE ON SOCIAL CONCERNS

Aloha Temple Members and Friends!

Please **REGISTER** and remember to **VOTE** in the upcoming **GENERAL ELECTION** on **Tuesday, November 5, 2024**.

Register to vote or check and update your voter registration at <https://elections.hawaii.gov/>.

You can also register in-person at a voter service center which will be open from October 22 - November 5, 2024, offering accessible voting, in person voting and same day registration. Voter service centers are established and operated by the County Elections Divisions.

Paper Voter Registration Applications must be submitted to your County Elections Division by October 28, 2024.

Hawaii is a vote-by-mail state, and ballots will arrive in the mail by October 18, 2024.

Who to vote for? What to vote for? — That is your personal, private decision.

Voting is an expression of values and is an important way to shape the future of our community and nation. It ensures that diverse voices are represented and that policies reflect the needs of all people and align with our values of compassion, inclusivity, and care for the world around us. Guided by the Buddha's Teaching, we should strive to be engaged in the civic life of our community sharing our values of openness, love, and selflessness with others.

By being informed and making thoughtful choices, we can contribute to a better future for everyone, regardless of beliefs or backgrounds. The decisions made in this election will impact many aspects of life, including healthcare, education, religious freedom, the environment, and democracy itself. We encourage everyone to consider these critical issues and to participate in the democratic process. The only way to uphold and protect our democracy is by exercising the right to vote.

In Gassho,

Bishop Toshiyuki Umitani

Rev. Blayne Higa, Chair
Committee on Social Concerns

IMPORTANT SECURITY NOTICE: BEWARE OF RECENT PHISHING EMAILS

We want to alert our community about recent phishing attempts targeting our temples and members. Fraudulent emails have been sent that appear to come from our ministers, but in reality, they originate from unknown email addresses, such as **rev.reverend@keemail.me**. These emails typically request gift cards or money, and may instruct recipients not to call the minister and to respond only via email, claiming the matter is urgent and confidential—such as surprising temple members with a gift.

These emails are not from our ministers. Scammers likely created fake email addresses using our reverends' names to exploit their public role and the trust of our community.

Please be aware:

- **Our ministers will never ask for gift cards or money via email.**
- If you receive such an email, do not respond or click on any links, as this may compromise your security.
- On our website at <https://hongwanjihawaii.com/temples/>, you can look up email addresses for temples and ministers.
- If in doubt, call the minister or temple office directly to verify the email's authenticity.

If the email is determined to be fraudulent, you may file a report with the FBI's Internet Crime Complaint Center (IC3) at **IC3.gov**. Reporting these crimes is quick, and the information you provide helps the FBI identify patterns and build cases against the perpetrators. These crimes often target elder individuals, and timely reporting is crucial, as cybercrimes involving victims over 60 can result in stiffer penalties.

By staying vigilant and reporting suspicious emails, we can protect our community and support efforts to combat cybercrime.

TRIPLE CELEBRATION

On September 7 and 8, the Triple Celebration was held at the Ala Moana Hotel under the theme "Sharing the Joy of Nembutsu, Our Living Heart of Gratitude." With 295 attendees, it was the largest gathering since the pandemic. As part of the "Green Hongwanji" initiative, no printed materials were used, and [a digital booklet](#) was provided. This booklet included messages from His Eminence Monshu Kojun Ohtani, Governor General Shoyu Ogino, Hawaii Governor Josh Green, five mayors, Bishop Toshiyuki Umitani, President Dr. Warren Tamamoto, and other organizations. To view these messages, please scan the QR code at the end of this message. This innovative, eco-friendly approach allowed us to embrace sustainability while sharing these important messages. We encourage you to explore the booklet and reflect on these thoughtful words of celebration and support.

The first day began with a service commemorating the 850th Anniversary of Shinran Shonin's Birth and the 800th Anniversary of Jodo Shinshu's establishment. Led by Bishop Toshiyuki Umitani, the service blended timeless rituals with local touches. The Yamaguchi Gagaku Association from Japan enhanced the service with beautiful melodies, creating an atmosphere of reverence. Participants cast KEHA, lotus-shaped petals symbolizing the Pure Land, offering a new, inclusive way to engage with the sacredness of the occasion.

Following the service, Rev. Dr. Takashi Miyaji delivered a dynamic keynote, inspiring reflection on Shinran Shonin's teachings and the gratitude embodied in the Nembutsu. The Yamaguchi Gagaku Association also gave a concert, including a traditional Bugaku dance and a stirring rendition of "Hawaii Aloha," which united the room in shared emotion.

The afternoon workshops explored key themes and practical applications of Jodo Shinshu teachings. Rev. Kiyonobu Kuwahara connected his presentation to the 800th Anniversary of Jodo Shinshu's establishment, emphasizing the enduring relevance of Shinran's teachings. Mr. David Atcheson reviewed the history of the Hongwanji in Hawaii, focusing on its resilience during the late 1800s, providing valuable insights as we reflect on 135 years of history. Rev. Blayne Higa's "Compassion in Action" workshop focused on modern applications of Nembutsu in compassionate actions. Mr. Steve Lohse's "Green the Hongwanji" stressed environmental stewardship, while Mrs. Debbie Kubota's "The Giving Gratitude Tree" encouraged fostering

gratitude within communities. These workshops offered fresh perspectives on applying Jodo Shinshu principles in today's world.

On the second day, we celebrated the 135th Anniversary of the Honpa Hongwanji Mission of Hawaii with a grand service led by Bishop Umitani. All ministers gathered to praise the virtues of the Buddha, with representatives from various organizations participating in incense offerings as a symbol of unity. Bishop Umitani's Dharma Message provided a profound reflection on Nembutsu teachings and Hawaii Kyodan's legacy, connecting the past, present, and future of the Hongwanji in Hawaii.

The day ended with a panel discussion moderated by Rev. Dr. Miyaji. Miss Edyth Vassall, Mr. Dan Kaula Thompson, and Rev. Ai Hironaka shared how the Nembutsu shaped their spiritual journeys. Edyth's heartfelt reflections touched many, while Dan's humorous stories, including his experiences with the Maui Wildfire, brought both laughter and deep reflection. Rev. Ai's sincere words about the Nembutsu offered an opportunity for everyone to contemplate its power in their lives.

In closing, we extend our heartfelt gratitude to all participants, and volunteers whose dedication made this event a great success. The challenges of the pandemic have only strengthened our resolve and deepened our joy of the Nembutsu. United in the six characters of Namo Amida Butsu, we look forward to continuing our shared journey toward a bright future for the Honpa Hongwanji Mission of Hawaii. A HUI HOU!



Rev. Ai Hironaka and Rev. Tomo Hojo
Triple Celebration Steering Committee Co-chair



2024 BSC SUMMER SESSION

The Buddhist Study Center was fortunate to have Rev. Dr. Kenji Akahoshi as the Summer Session speaker for 2024 after he recuperated from his accidental fall last year. He made up for his absence last year with his visit this year.

The 50th Anniversary Summer Session was held on August 5-9 at the Buddhist Study Center. Each night Rev. Dr. Akahoshi centered on the idea of the Jodo Shinshu perspective in contemporary America. He knows his views may be contrary to other ministers, but he felt that to reach our present-day audience, we need to speak about Jodo Shinshu in a language that they will understand. The language may seem simple, but we are trying reach individuals that may walk into our temple one morning. To make them feel at ease and welcome, we use the words like "Thank you" to express Namu Amida Butsu.

Rev. Dr. Akahoshi requested that he speak to many different audiences. Before the Summer Session, he spoke at Mililani Hongwanji. After the Summer Session on his neighbor island tour, he had an online session with Kauai District. Following that, he flew to Hawaii District and had a session at Kona Hongwanji, an Obon service at Holualoa Hongwanji, a session at Hilo Betsuin, and a final session at Kamuela Hongwanji.

In Maui District, he held a session at Makawao Hongwanji. Back on Oahu, he held a session with the Oahu Hongwanji Council on attracting new members that he also held with the Maui Hongwanji Council. The Honolulu Council held a session on attracting a younger audience. Ending his stay in Hawaii, he held a session at Aiea Hongwanji and a Dharma talk and talk story session at Hawaii Betsuin.

We are grateful to Rev. Dr. Akahoshi for his tireless efforts to spread the Teachings in the contemporary context. We learned a lot from him and hope to put into practice the many ideas he shared in our temples, sanghas, and community.



POSTER CONTEST

Calling all artists and photographers! The Commission on Buddhist Education is sponsoring a poster contest to visually express the 2025 Hongwanji theme/slogan "Nurturing Nembutsu: Cultivating Awareness." The focus will be on how the Nembutsu nurtures a sense of gratitude, awareness of our true nature, and compassion for all beings. The posture will reflect Shinran Shonin's teachings, emphasizing the universality of Amida Buddha's compassion and the importance of living in harmony and peace. Entrants will be encouraged to reflect on Nembutsu's role in cultivating a deeper awareness of themselves and others. Posters can be created using any medium (e.g., painting, drawing, digital art, photography) but must be submitted as a high-resolution digital file (JPEG, PNG, or PDF). Poster dimensions: Standard poster size (24" x 36" or equivalent in digital format) - See attached flyer for details. Here is the [link](#) to enter and submit the digital poster file. The winning poster will be selected as a statewide poster promoting the 2025 Theme and Slogan. Rev. Shawn Yagi (Kauai Commissioner) and Debbie Kubota (Honolulu Commissioner) are the chairs of this project. Please contact Debbie Kubota at dekub@gmail.com if any questions arise. The deadline for poster submission is November 16, 2024.

2024 HONOLULU AND OAHU DISTRICTS' NEMBUTSU SEMINAR

Kagirinaki Ai to Jihi: Toward LGBTQ+ Equity and Inclusion in Hawaii's Japanese Communities is our Honolulu and Oahu Districts' 2024 Nembutsu Seminar. This event will be held on Friday, October 25th from 6:30 - 8:30 pm at the Japanese Cultural Center of Hawaii - 2454 S Beretania St., Honolulu, HI 96826. *Kagirinaki Ai to Jihi* is the Japanese translation for "Infinite Love and Compassion." This event will feature local speakers – Associate Justice Sabrina Shizue Makena, the first openly LGBTQ+ Asian American to serve on a state supreme court and Bill Kaneko, former president of the Honolulu chapter of the JACL who led the national organization to become the first non-LGBT civil rights organization to support marriage equality. A Mainland Japanese-American mother and son, Marsha and Aiden Aizumi co-authors of *"Two Spirits, One Heart"* will be speaking about their life's journey —Aiden was born a girl in Japan and was adopted by Marsha and her husband. In 2008, he came out as transgender & transitioned from female to male. Please join us for this impactful session, which supports the Honpa Hongwanji Mission of Hawaii's efforts to be welcoming and inclusive to all. Here's the [link](#) to register—deadline is October 18th.

SAVE THE DATE: UPCOMING EVENTS

2024 KAUAI DISTRICT NEMBUTSU SEMINAR

Date & Time: Sunday, October 6th, 2024, from 10 a.m. to 11:30 a.m. (HST)

Location: West Kauai Hongwanji Hanapepe Temple (1-3860 Kaunualii Hwy, Hanapepe) / Zoom

Speaker: Rev. Blayne Higa, Resident Minister of Kona Hongwanji Buddhist Temple

Registration: <https://forms.gle/yEeEFP2VWYqP9raP6>

Registration Fee: Free

PBA LIGHTING OUR WAY BANQUET

Date: Friday, November 15th, 2024

Time: Reception at 5:00 p.m. • Dinner at 6:00 p.m.

Location: Ala Moana Hotel by Mantra

To become a sponsor, purchase individual tickets, or make a donation to support the Banquet, please visit PBA's Banquet website at <https://pacificbuddhistacademy.org/giving/lighting-our-way> or contact Megan Lee at megan.lee@pbahi.org for more information.