

“THE CALLING VOICE”

# Ka Leo Kāhea



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## Mourning for America

*Editor's Note: The following Dharma message was delivered at Kona Hongwanji Mission on Sept. 14, 2025 after the assassination of conservative commentator Charlie Kirk in Orem, Utah.*

BY REVEREND BLAYNE HIGA  
KONA HONGWANJI MISSION

This morning I stand before you with a heavy heart. Earlier this week, we witnessed yet another act of political violence — the murder of a popular conservative activist who was gunned down while speaking at a college campus.

This horrific event has sent shockwaves through many communities. Many in our country, who regarded him as a man of faith and a champion for their values, are mourning his loss, while others, who viewed him as an oppressor promoting hate and division, are not.

It's not my place, nor anyone else's, to tell someone how they should feel right now. We need to extend grace and compassion to everyone during this tumultuous time. This underscores the complex reality of being human, of grief, and the polarized and dangerous times we are living through.

However, we should all mourn the loss of another human being to the culture of rage, contempt, and gun violence that threatens to consume us all.

Charlie Kirk championed positions and a worldview I wholeheartedly oppose. Yet, he was not an enemy but a fellow American exercising his right to free speech. I respect that and mourn his violent death. We should all be appalled by political violence in any form. Full stop.

This is not how we resolve our differences in America. We debate civilly and passionately, present our views to the public, and hold free, fair elections that showcase competing visions for our country. Violence in any form contradicts the sacred principles of democracy.

And yet, we cannot ignore the very real harm his words



*Courtesy of Nani Welch*  
Rev. Blayne Higa: “We need to extend grace and compassion to everyone during this tumultuous time.”

### MINISTER'S MESSAGE

and actions caused to many in our country. We can both mourn what his loss means for his loved ones and acknowledge all that he did to hurt others. All of these truths can coexist. We can face complexity with honesty, sensitivity, and compassion.

And yet, we cannot ignore the very real harm his words and actions caused to many in our country. We can both mourn what his loss means for his loved ones and acknowledge all that he did to hurt others. All of these truths can coexist. We can face complexity with honesty, sensitivity, and compassion.

We've seen this clash of realities in the news and on social media over the past few days, with heartfelt tributes to a loving husband and father alongside calls to hold him accountable for the harmful and destructive things he said and stood for.

When our lives come to an end, we are remembered as a whole person, not just the parts we want others to focus

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*Courtesy of Rev. Tomo Hojo*

Rev. Shawn Yagi explained the elements that may be part of an altar on special occasions during a Minister's Lay Assistant Retreat held at Lihu'e Hongwanji on Aug. 23.

## Helping Ministers While Strengthening Our Temples

The Minister's Lay Assistant program — once a cautious idea — is finding its footing through quiet, dedicated service

BY GAIL S. TAGASHIRA  
MANAGING EDITOR,  
KA LEO KĀHEA

Some 15 years ago, at a Giseikai meeting in the Social Hall of Honpa Hongwanji Betsuin, temple leaders and a few ministers voiced a warning that has become all too true today:

The shortage of ministers was growing, and it was only expected to get worse in the coming years. Even then, ministers serving their temples in the mid-1980s were overworked, under compensated, and being asked to cover more temples across an ever-widening geographic area — with no relief in sight.

In short, something had to be done to help ministers, and quickly.

Up until then, the idea of Lay Assistants — trained volunteers who could help ministers by handling time-consuming but necessary daily

and weekly duties — had already been discussed in Japan and on the U.S. mainland. In some places, programs were already up and running.

But in Hawai'i, plans for a Minister's Lay Assistant Program struggled to take hold, partly due to resistance from those who feared their roles might change or disappear, that the program might lower standards, fail to meet its goals, and ultimately not serve the sanghas adequately.

Fast forward to 2025 and under the Ministerial Training Committee, the MLA program has made gradual progress, but now faces a need for a reassessment of its purpose and direction.

Over the years, the landscape has changed dramatically.

The number of temples, the composition of sanghas and the structure of the kyo-

dan itself are vastly different from what they were in the '80s, shaped not only by shifting demographics but also by technology that has transformed how ministers communicate, teach and serve their communities.

What hasn't changed is the Dharma, basic service protocols and the need for more ways to assist ministers.

Today there are several trained MLAs and 25 Certified Minister's Lay Assistants statewide according to Bishop Toshiyuki Umitani and Rev. Blayne Higa, resident minister of Kona Hongwanji and chair of the Ministerial Training Committee.

A comprehensive review of the program's focus has been underway, examining the needs of each temple, island and district.

“We will recommend im-

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## A Journey of Nembutsu Remembered and Renewed

Celebrating 125 years, Lihu'e Hongwanji honored pioneers whose compassion and vision shaped the community

An extraordinary celebration of Lihu'e Hongwanji Mission's 125th anniversary took place on Nov. 2, attended by more than 100 guests and members, many of whom were affiliated with the temple for more than 70 years.

The event marked an appreciative, heart-rending reflection on the past, remembering the pioneers who worked tirelessly to spread the Dharma despite hardships and challenges.

Officiated by Bishop Toshiyuki Umitani, the open-

ing service traced the rich history and poignant stories of those who shaped the lives of immigrants and the community.

To prepare for his Dharma message, Bishop Umitani found himself reading about its long history marked by significant events and ministers whose names are recognized in Hawai'i Hongwanji's history of ministers.

Before the temple was even established, Rev. Soryu Kagahi visited Kaua'i in August of 1889 and realized a huge need and desire of im-

migrants seeking spiritual guidance.

Eleven years later, Rev. Kenyu Arai arrived in December of 1900 to begin the tireless work of building a temple on land donated by Lihu'e Plantation. Three years later, after the temple was completed, he returned to Japan.

For the next 45 years, Rev. Hiseki Miyasaki “truly embodied the pioneering spirit of early Hongwanji ministers,” Bishop Umitani said.

“His 45 years of remark-

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*Courtesy of Dennis Fujimoto/The Garden Island*

Members and guests at Lihu'e Hongwanji's 125th Anniversary celebration attended an opening service on Nov. 2, officiated by Bishop Toshiyuki Umitani, center. Rev. Tomo Hojo of West Kaua'i Hongwanji, seated at left, and Lihu'e's resident minister Rev. Shawn Yagi, also presided.



BY REV. TOSHIYUKI UMITANI  
BISHOP, HONPA HONGWANJI  
MISSION OF HAWAI'I

*Editor's note: At this year's 62nd annual Hawai'i State Lay Association Convention, Bishop Toshiyuki Umitani delivered the following message at Honpa Hongwanji Hawai'i Betsuin on September 13.*

It is truly a joy to be with you at this Lay Convention, and I thank you for giving me this opportunity to share a message.

First, I would like to express my deep appreciation to Russell Nonaka, President of the Hawaii State Lay Association, and to this year's Convention co-chairs, Rick Tabor and Rene Mansho, for their leadership and dedication in making this gathering possible.

Although I am not able to be with you in person, I am grateful to join you virtually from Tokyo, Japan. While we are separated by distance and time, we are united in the Dharma.

I hope you are enjoying the convention — renewing friendships, making new ones, and most importantly, sharing in the joy of the Nembutsu with fellow members from across our temples.

The theme of this year's convention is both meaningful and timely: "Let's Be the Authors of Our Future."

When we hear the word "author," we usually think of someone who

# Writing Our Shared Dharma Story

## BISHOP'S CORNER

writes a book.

But more deeply, an author is someone who originates, creates and brings something into being. Each of us, in our own way, is already an author.

Through the choices we make, the values we live by, and the stories we share, we are continually writing the future — not only for ourselves, but for the generations to come.

In our Jōdo Shinshū tradition, so many individuals can be called "authors."

- Shakyamuni Buddha, who awakened to the truth of impermanence and interdependence more than 2,500 years ago.
- His disciples, who carried his teaching forward.
- The Seven Masters of India, China and Japan — Nagarjuna, Vasubandhu, Tan-luan, Tao-cho, Shan-tao, Genshin and Hōnen — whom Shinran Shōnin revered as teachers of the Dharma.
- Shinran Shōnin himself, who clarified the Pure Land path for ordinary people like us.
- Rennyo Shōnin, the 8th Monshu, who revitalized the Hongwanji.
- Countless ministers and lay followers who embodied the Dharma through their lives.
- Ministers of the Honpa Hongwanji Mission of Hawaii, past and present.
- And all of you — faithful members of our sangha today.

Each of these individuals, in their own time and place, received the Dharma and shared the Compassion of Amida Buddha. In doing so, they became authors of the Jōdo Shinshū tradition.

Shinran Shōnin himself once said:

*"How joyous I am, Gutoku Shinran, disciple of Sakyamuni!*  
*Rare is it to come upon the sacred scriptures from the westward land of India and the commentaries of the masters of China and Japan, but now I have been able to encounter them.*  
*Rare is it to hear them, but already I have been able to hear.*  
*Reverently entrusting myself to the teaching, practice, and realization that are the true essence of the Pure Land Way, I am especially aware of the profundity of the Tathagata's benevolence.*  
*Here I rejoice in what I have heard and extol what I have attained."*

— From "The True Teaching, Practice and Realization of the Pure Land Way"

Although he composed profound writings — the Kyōgyōshinshō, Shōshinge, and Wasan — Shinran Shōnin never saw himself as the originator of something new. He humbly regarded himself as a disciple of Hōnen and above all, as a recipient of Amida Buddha's Vow. His life was simply one of gratitude — rejoicing in what he had received, and sharing what he had realized.

Rev. Sokusui Murakami once offered a beautiful analogy:

*"If we compare Jōdo Shinshū to a delicious feast, then the ingredients of the feast are the Primal Vow of Amida taught in the Larger Sutra.*  
*"Just as all the nutrients necessary for sustaining human health are contained within the ingredients, so too, all the workings that transform our delusion and open us to enlightenment are contained within Amida's Primal Vow.*

*"However, no matter how rich in nutrition the ingredients may be, if they remain only as raw ingredients, they are neither delicious nor a feast.*  
*"It is only when the ingredients are skillfully prepared in various ways and seasoned with care by a talented cook that they become a delicious meal that stirs our appetite.*  
*"The Seven Patriarchs of India, China and Japan may be thought of as those who, each in their own country and their own era, seasoned the 'ingredients' of Amida's Primal Vow in a way that suited the people of their time.*  
*"Although the final forms of the dishes may differ, the ingredients are always the same — Amida's Primal Vow.*  
*"And then, carefully presenting each of these completed dishes, arranging them on the table, and inviting us, saying, 'Come, let us all partake together' — that, we may say, is what Shinran Shōnin has done for us."*

Our role, then, is not to reinvent the Dharma, but to share in this nourishing feast with deep gratitude — and to invite others to the table as well.

As I reflect on my own life as a minister, I feel profoundly fortunate for the many teachers, colleagues and sangha members who guided me along the way. And I am sure each of you, too, can recall someone — a parent, grandparent, minister, or friend—who gently guided you toward the Nembutsu, helping you to discover the comfort and joy of Amida Buddha's Compassion.

This is why the theme of this convention is so meaningful. To be the authors of our future means that each of us, ministers and laypeople alike, has the opportunity and responsibility to guide others by sharing our own story of the Dharma.

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## Minister's Message

Continued from Page 1

on. We have the capacity to accept the full scope of a life with all its contradictions. That is what it means to be a mature human being.

In this time of deep anger and division, we should reflect on the words of Shotoku Taishi, the revered patron of Buddhism from 6th-century Japan, who said:

*"Let us cease from wrath, and refrain from angry looks. Nor let us be resentful when others differ from us. For all beings have hearts, and each heart has its own leanings.*  
*"Their right is our wrong, and our right is their wrong. We are not unquestionable sages, nor are they unquestionably fools. We are both simply ordinary beings."*

His wise words, rooted in the Buddha's teachings, encourage us to recognize our shared humanity and to live with humility and compassion for others, even those with whom we disagree. Prince Shotoku reminds us that our very existence depends on our relationships with others.

When we honestly reflect on who and what we are, we realize our deep connection and mutual dependence on all things.

The Buddhist practice of loving kindness begins with ourselves and extends to all beings, including those we find challenging to love and care for. When we reflect deeply on our interdependent lives, we see that what harms one person likely harms others, and what benefits one will probably benefit many. This is how we should cultivate the empathy and compassion needed to help heal our deeply fractured nation

and world.

In a teaching from the Amida Sutra, one of the three sacred scriptures of Shin Buddhism, there is a beautiful two-headed bird named Gumyocho that dwells in the Pure Land. Meaning "shared life," the Gumyocho is said to have a melodious voice that sings the Dharma, guiding those who hear its song toward enlightenment.

According to legend, the bird's two heads had very different personalities and desires. When one head was sleepy, the other wanted to play. When one was hungry, the other wanted to rest. Eventually, the two heads began to resent and hate each other.

One day, while one of the heads was sleeping, the other feasted on delicious fruits and flowers until he was full. When the sleeping head awoke, he wanted to eat too, but he was already full because they shared one stomach. He was angry that he could not enjoy any of the food.

So, he took revenge by secretly poisoning the other head, which resulted in its death. However, he also suffered and died because they shared the same body.

As he was dying, he realized how foolish he had been. While he resented his other head, he failed to see that his own life depended on it. By harming his other head, he was also hurting himself. In the Pure Land, the Gumyocho sings, "The way which destroys others also destroys oneself. The way that keeps others alive also keeps oneself alive." Through this story, the Buddha teaches that we are all living a life of mutual dependence.

However, it often feels as though we are living in vastly different worlds from one another. This clash of perspec-



Courtesy of Honpa Hongwanji Hawai'i Betsuin

The beautiful, two-headed Gumyocho was said to have had a melodious voice that sang the Dharma, but it had different personalities and desires. Its story teaches us a lesson on life's mutual dependence.

tives and values has led to the dehumanization of those we disagree with.

The pain and hurt we continue to cause each other result in mutual harm. In our obsession with winning and being "right" at all costs, we have lost sight of our shared humanity. Despite our differences, we are part of one community, one nation, and one world. We are one human family, and our lives are bound together.

So yes, I do mourn the murder of Charlie Kirk as well as the many others who have been victims of political violence in our country.

I mourn all the innocent lives lost to uncontrolled gun violence.

I mourn our culture of anger and contempt toward those we disagree with.

I mourn the loss of empathy for those outside our own tribes.

I mourn the use of faith to justify discrimination and exclusion.

I mourn the rise of violent rhetoric and the intentional stirring of anger.

I mourn how our leaders

Our challenges, obstacles, and hurts are the nutrients that help us grow. The Buddha's teachings enable us to accept it all and turn the muck into a life of awakening. But we must intentionally choose to do this difficult work.

It is very easy for us to be consumed by anger. However, our unchecked anger and resentment will only lead to more suffering. The Buddha teaches that "Blood stains can not be removed by more blood; resentment can not be removed by more resentment; resentment can be removed only by forgetting it."

And as Dr. Martin Luther King warned, "We must learn to live together as brothers or perish together as fools." We should deeply reflect on the words of the Buddha and Dr. King, which remind us that our path forward cannot be built on anger, contempt, or violence. We should strive to respond thoughtfully and peacefully rather than react impulsively and violently in the days ahead.

Perhaps we can finally understand what it truly means to be human through these tragedies before we destroy each other. Our choice is clear: we can become better versions of ourselves or remain trapped in resentment, anger, and fear.

It's time to set aside these childish and selfish games, put on our big kid pants, and do the messy work of healing our broken and divided country before we face the fate of the two-headed bird. We can and must hold each other accountable because our future depends on it.

In closing, please join me in Gassho to recite the Name of Amida, the Buddha of all-inclusive wisdom and all-embracing compassion, with the aspiration to be better and do better in these troubled times.

Namo Amida Butsu



BY DR. WARREN TAMAMOTO  
PRESIDENT, HONPA HONGWANJI  
MISSION OF HAWAI'I

Aloha kākou! I hope that you and your loved ones are in good health and good spirits as we enter the holiday season and look forward to the New Year of 2026.

Our theme and slogan for 2026 is Nurturing Nembutsu: Sharing Gratitude.

Shinran Shonin taught that the Nembutsu, the name of Amida Buddha, verbalized as Namo Amida Butsu is an expression of gratitude. The Nembutsu, Namo Amida Butsu, is our grateful response to Amida Buddha's Calling Voice.

Nurturing Nembutsu: Sharing Gratitude reminds us that every moment of our lives, Amida Buddha embraces us with immeasurable Wisdom and Compassion.

Fun fact: Sometimes I recite the Nembutsu without sincerity or gratitude. I do it automatically in concert with others.

Sometimes my mind might be

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

somewhere else. (Surely I'm not the only one?)

Yet, here is the amazing thing. I am constantly reassured that Amida accepts me, a bonbu, an imperfect being, just as I am.

Namo Amida Butsu.

This past September, I sang as part of the Honpa Hongwanji Mission of Hawai'i Choralfest for the very first time! I admit that I did not sign up with enthusiasm. I was "nagged" into it by my sister, Mrs. Gail Taira.

I did not listen to the music or practice until a month or so before the performance. I was informed that I was a tenor (although I could not reach some of the higher notes). Not a problem because I lip-synched through the highest notes.

As we got closer to the performance date, I became anxious. I downloaded the music and listened to the soprano / tenor section of each musical piece. I tried to sing along with the recorded voice. (This is an interesting exercise in letting go of your ego, because you are following an opera singer with power and range).

I attended practice sessions at Mililani Hongwanji and Hawai'i Betsuin. I downloaded the music to my phone and listened to the music at home and in my car.

Surprisingly, I found myself en-

joying the process of learning the music and singing as part of a group. It helped that I actually enjoyed singing and listening to the songs chosen by the Music Committee.

Each song was different, but each one was beautiful. Of course, my fellow Choralfest tenors were a good-natured group.

Everyone just did their best and tried to make it a fun experience. If they heard any sour notes from me, they did not let on. It was a very positive group learning experience.

Saturday was the day that the entire group, which included neighbor island, mainland U.S. and a few Japan participants, gathered for the first time at the Hawai'i Betsuin under the direction of Choral Director Nola Nahulu and Music Committee Chair and pianist Francis Okano.

Ms. Nahulu has a wonderful way of commanding the attention of the entire group, getting each section to perform their best and weaving the voices together into one choral performance.

After a half day of practice, we were "ready."

Sunday September 21 was the day of Choralfest 2025. Prior to the service we had a final practice session. The Choralfest 2025 performance (in my unbiased opinion,) went very well.

The video is available on the Honpa Hongwanji Hawai'i YouTube channel (search Choralfest 2025 Music Service).

Overall, it was a memorable, uplifting experience for me. I would do it again!

I enjoyed learning the music and having a small part but trying my best to contribute to the group effort. I had fun and found it to be spiritually uplifting.

One song in particular brought tears to my eyes (and still does).

"To My Daughters" includes the following lyrics:

*"In life, my daughters, there will come a time when you will make your way alone.*

*Oh, then, a load you'll bear, weighted down with cares, for you'll be facing what's unknown.*

*When life is hard, place your hands as one – place your hands in Gassho as you are.*

*In Amida's warming, assuring light – in this light, yes, you will walk on until the lullabies that you heard long ago, while snugly held on Mother's back, return and gently touch your heart, and so warmed, your heart will glow at last."*

Lyrics by Ryunji Yonemura  
Music by Kouichi Iwashiro

My message to you for 2026 is — try something new!

A new activity, a new destination or perhaps a new skill.

Whatever you do, wherever you are, trust that you will walk in Amida's Light.

In Gassho,  
Warren Tamamoto, M.D.

# Lay Association Convenes for 62nd Annual Convention

Representatives gather in person and on-line to adopt two resolutions, hear from leaders and continue under its new name

BY DENNIS TASHIRO  
WINDWARD HONGWANJI  
MISSION

Delegates and observers from Hawai'i's Honpa Hongwanji temples gathered in person and via Zoom for the 62nd annual Convention of the Hawai'i State Lay Association (HSLA) on Sept. 12 and 13, 2025.

The Convention theme was "Let's Be the Authors of our Future!"

Friday evening's session was held at Jikoen Hongwanji and included the annual Board of Directors

meeting and a business session where two resolutions were adopted.

Saturday's session at Hawai'i Betsuin featured Hawai'i House speaker Scott Saiki, the state's and newly-appointed Insurance Commissioner.

Saturday's program also included a message from Bishop Toshiyuki Umitani via Zoom in Japan, a presentation by Emi Hashi, the HHMH Youth Specialist, a kupuna resource panel that included representatives from several State agencies and a Project Dana presentation.



Courtesy of Rick Tabor

Representatives at the 62nd Hawai'i State Lay Association convention take break during Saturday's meeting on Sept. 13 in the Honpa Hongwanji Betsuin Social Hall.

During the closing service, Rev. Yuika Hasebe installed 2026 HSLA Officers and Directors.

Previously known as the Hawai'i State Federation of Honpa Hongwanji Lay Associations, or the Lay Federation, HSLA is its new name.

Federation Bylaws were revised in 2023. They became effective at the conclusion of the 2024 convention when the new name was implemented, and the organiza-

tional structure and manner in which future annual conventions were revised and re-organized.

Previous conventions were planned by each Hongwanji district on a rotating basis and the location for conventions was at each district's island.

The Lay Federation Officers were primarily from the host district.

The previous method placed a tremendous burden

on the host district, particularly on smaller districts.

With HSLA, the elected officers and board members come from each district and planning for conventions are done by a committee made up of members from most, if not all districts.

The committee then selects the site for the annual convention. The date for 2026's convention in mid-September is yet to be determined.

## Advice From Commissioner Saiki

After years of hurricanes, wildfires and floods, insurance premiums have skyrocketed for homeowners, businesses and yes, even temples.

Premiums have doubled and in some cases, tripled across Hawai'i.

On the second day of the State Lay Association Convention, former Speaker of the House and now State Insurance Commissioner Scott Saiki presented an overview of steps temples can take to help mitigate the high premiums.

His two main recommendations: keep structures insurable by routinely repairing and maintaining buildings and work with an insurance

broker to explore available options.

Appointed by Governor Josh Green in July of 2025, Commissioner Saiki offered practical advice and fielded questions from the assembly such as whether to purchase hurricane coverage, self-insuring and the pros and cons of high-deductible policies.

His office oversees the insurance industry including companies and agents, focusing on stabilizing the insurance market and keeping coverage accessible.

He encouraged attendees to contact his office at insurance@dcca.hawaii.gov or calling (808) 586-2790.



Courtesy of Rick Tabor  
Scott Saiki delivered advice on managing insurance costs to temple leaders.

## 2026 Living Treasures of Hawai'i

Six of Hawai'i's cultural, artistic and humanitarian leaders have been announced as 2026 Living Treasures.

They are Dr. Billy Bergin, Kumu Hula Māpuana de Silva, Jim and Vickie Kennedy, Sheree Tamura and Dr. B. Ka'imiloa Chrisman.

On Feb. 21, 2026, they will honored at the 51st annual luncheon in the Hilton Hawai'an Village Coral Ballroom starting at noon.

More information on tickets is available from the Honpa Hongwanji Mission of Hawai'i website at <https://hongwanjihawaii.com/living-treasures/>

## For the Record

**Waianae Obon** — In the September 1 issue of Ka Leo Kaheā, Dana Sewake was identified as a "wife, mother and grandmother who now lives in Hilo." Mrs. Sewake is not a grandmother.

**'Gathering of Compassion'** — At the anniversary of Lahaina's wildfires, Lahainaluna High School principal Richard Carosso was incorrectly cited in his remarks. His staff challenged the Department of Education, not the Department of Health.

**Choralfest** — A photo of Music Committee chair Francis Okano was incorrectly credited. It was taken by Wendie Yumori.



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The Ka Leo Kāhea provides a variety of articles on Jodo Shinshu Buddhism for Hawaii residents.

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# Choralfest Returns After a Seven-Year Hiatus

A hundred singers took part in intense rehearsals directed by a conducting legend

*Editor’s Note: The following appeared in “Musical Notes,” Honpa Hongwanji Mission’s Music Committee newsletter, as well as in “Goji,” Honpa Hongwanji Betsuin’s monthly newsletter. It is reprinted with permission.*

BY FRANCIS OKANO,  
CHAIRMAN  
HONPA HONGWANJI  
MISSION MUSIC COMMITTEE

After seven years, Honpa Hongwanji Mission of Hawaiʻi’s Music Committee ended its long Covid pause to stage a Choralfest at Hawaiʻi Betsuin on the weekend of Sept. 20-21, 2025.

Eager for music, 100 brave singers from as far east as Denver, Colorado and as far west as Kanazawa, Japan — not to mention the islands of Hawaiʻi — settled into the Social Hall at noon on Saturday to harmonize in the celebrated tradition of the Midou Ensoukai at the Honzan in Kyoto every fall.

And ready to whip them into shape was none other than Hawaiʻi’s foremost



Courtesy of Irene Nohara

Choral master Nola Nahulu, center, directed altos, left; tenors and basses, center, and sopranos, right, in six gathas before an appreciative crowd at Honpa Hongwanji Hawaiʻi Betsuin.

choral conductor, and Waianae Hongwanji’s very own, Nola Nahulu, director of Hawaiʻi Opera Chorus.

Over four intense hours, interrupted once for sumptuous refreshments, the singers rehearsed a total of six choral gathas.

They included “Where, Oh Where?” (Hotokesama wa); “To My Daughters,” (Musume tachi yo); “To All We Owe,” (Ikasarete); “Surely, We Will Meet Again Someday” (Kitto mata aeru ne); “Upon Clouds,” (Nagar-

eyuku kumo ni,) and “Gratefulness II,” (Ondokusan II).

After a gracious welcome speech by Bishop Toshiyuki Umitani, attendees were treated to an accomplished sanshin vocal and an Okinawan dance by Rev. Blayne Nakasone Sakata now with Honpa Hongwanji Hilo Betsuin.

Sunday morning buzzed in anticipation of choral singing at the Music Service.

To prepare for the first-ever live-streaming of Cho-

ralfest, the Betsuin’s technology team discreetly dotted the hondo with microphones and camera while working intently from a corner in the back.

Ever the innovator, conductor Nahulu this year had singers introduce each gatha by reading excerpts from the program notes that were printed in handouts for the congregation.

This public reading was sure to have encouraged the audience to read the program notes for a better un-

derstanding and appreciation of each choral work.

In her message to the assembly, Rimban Yuika Hasebe referenced the description, in the Amida-kyo Sutra, of jewels in the Pure Land gleaming and resonating in Amida Buddha’s gentle breeze.

She noted that we are like jewels that produce a wondrous harmony of sounds because the breeze of Amida’s wisdom and compassion touches our lives. She reminded us that we cannot create harmony without listening to others’ voices and we cannot create harmony without offering our own voices.

We receive and we give. The emcee presided graciously.

The conductor was, as always, in her element.

The Festival Choir sang beautifully.

The piano voiced its support.

The congregation applauded.

And, at the concluding lunch, friends mingled in warm fellowship and joy over savory delights.

# Fireside Chat Sessions Take to the Ocean

Through July 2026, the series explores ocean-themed Shin Buddhism

For those seeking a deeper understanding of Jodo Shinshu Buddhism, an intermediate-level series of classes is continuing through July, 2026.

The “Fireside Chat Sessions” are being moderated by Dr. Kenneth K. Tanaka, professor emeritus of Musashino University in Tokyo and former associate professor and assistant dean of Berkeley’s Institute of Buddhist Studies on the first Saturday of each month.

Professor Tanaka is the author of “Ocean: An Introduction to Jodo Shinshu Buddhism in America” which has been translated into Japa-

nese, Portuguese, Spanish, Chinese and German.

His oceanic themed “Fireside Chat” series began in October.

On Dec. 6, 2025, Rev. Jon Turner and Margret “Peggy” Myer will speak on “Swimming by Striving — Practice” followed by “Gasping for Air — Spiritual Impasse” on Jan. 3 with James Pollard and Sharon Sasaki, recently ordained Tokudo minister from Buddhist Temple of San Diego.

The remaining dates, titles and speakers are:

**Feb. 7, 2026:** “Letting Go — Shinjin Realization and Entrusting” with Rev. Dr.

Kenji Akahoshi and Michael Elliott.

**March 7:** “Floating — Ocean That is Amida’s Primal Vow” with Rev. Jerry Hirano and Myrna Morrell.

**April 4:** “Swimming With Ease — Assurance, Joy and Clarity” with Rev. Diana Thompson, Eriko Yamaguchi and Daniel Jung.

**May 2:** “Thinking of Others — Engagement With Others” with Ken Yamada and Merry Hiroshima.

**June 6:** “Reaching the Island — Birth in the Pure Land” with Rev. Todd Tsuchiya and Eiko Okusa.

**July 11:** “Going Out Back Into the Ocean — Returning

to this Sahā Realm” with Rev. Dr. David Matsumoto and Denise Cork.

Each class is scheduled from 2 to 5:30 p.m. (HST) with an optional 20-minute meditation session beginning at 1:30 p.m., followed by a layperson sharing their understanding of the month’s topic and a 10-minute Q&A session.

After the guest speakers’ presentations, the 10-minute Q&A period allows participants a chance to clarify points with the speakers.

No fees are being charged but donations are accepted either online at the time of registration.

Attendees may register at



Courtesy of Orange County Buddhist Church

Rev. Jon Turner, resident minister of Orange County Buddhist Church in Anaheim.

<https://forms.gle/oYbRjVP-g6sdnQz2v7>

Questions may be directed to [shinbuddhismcourse@gmail.com](mailto:shinbuddhismcourse@gmail.com)

## Bishop’s Corner

Continued from Page 2

Our Honpa Hongwanji Mission of Hawaiʻi is sustained not only by the teachings, but also by the

stories of people who lived in the teachings: Your story of attending Sunday service with your family. Your story

of finding comfort in the Nembutsu during times of grief. Your story of creating a welcoming space among Dharma friends.

Each story becomes a chapter in the living book of Jōdo Shinshū in Hawaiʻi. When shared, these stories inspire others to entrust themselves to the boundless Compassion of Amida Buddha.

In that spirit, I am deeply proud of the many programs and services we have undertaken together: the Social Concerns Committee, Peace Day, the Archives Committee, Green Hongwanji Initiatives, the Minister’s Lay Assistant Program, Project Dana, the Living Treasures of Hawaiʻi Program, and many temple-based activities by the Jr. YBA, Young Adults, BWA and so many others.

These efforts are living expressions of our shared authorship.

Last year, the HHMH observed its 135th Anniversary. And this year, we also celebrate important milestones: Mōʻiliʻili Hongwanji BWA’s 100th anniversary, Kona Hongwanji BWA’s 125th, Lihue Hongwanji’s 125th, and Lanai Hongwanji’s 100th.

These milestones remind us of the sacrifices and dedication of those who came before us. I cannot help but express gratitude for the many causes and conditions that brought us together as the Hongwanji sangha in Hawaiʻi.

Their stories of compassion, gratitude and friendship have paved the way for us to listen to and live by the Dharma today.

We also prepare to say farewell to Waiʻanae Hongwanji Mission, which will close by the end of this year. Of course, this is a moment of sadness. But let us not see it only as an ending.

Throughout Buddhist history, temples have risen, declined, and transformed — but the Dharma has never ceased to flow. We must ensure that the legacy of Waiʻanae Hongwanji will continue in new forms, and its stories will live on as part of the great tapestry of the Honpa Hongwanji Mission of Hawaiʻi.

Sailing together on the turbulent ocean of uncertainty is not easy. But we are not adrift. The Nembutsu is our guiding star. It assures us that even amid division and conflict, the Dharma has

the power to enrich our lives and bring peace to our hearts.

Together, as ministers and laypeople, we listen deeply to the Dharma and affirm its truth in our lives. Shinran Shōnin reminds us that we are all embraced by Amida Buddha’s Boundless Compassion — just as we are, with all our differences, limitations and imperfections.

In this realization, we see that we are already bound together in Amida’s “Golden Chain of Love.”

With that, let us continue to make our temples places of welcome, warmth and belonging where the voices of the Nembutsu are heard. Let us work together for a society where everyone can live with dignity, happiness and spiritual fulfillment.

And so, I return to the theme of this convention: Each of us, in our own way, is an author. Through the choices we make, the values we uphold, and the stories we share, we are writing the future — both for ourselves and for generations to follow.

So, my dear Dharma friends, as authors, what kind of story will you share?

Namo Amida Butsu

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# Looking Ahead to 2026 as Obon 2025 Draws to a Close

*It was an unforgettable year. Valley Isle residents gathered to remember Lahaina, 2023. It seemed like all of Hawai'i's Obon dancers gathered in record numbers to celebrate. And a 121-year-old temple in Wai'anāe held its last Obon.*

*The hard work — the planning, cooking, cleaning, repairing, rehearsing for months on end — paid off as we remembered those who have passed on while eagerly anticipating next year.*

*Memorial fans and light curtains promise to brighten the 2026 season thanks to the tireless efforts of hundreds of volunteers.*

## Mahalo to the ‘Honorable Tired Persons’

BY REVEREND KERRY KIYOHARA  
MAKAWAO HONGWANJI BUDDHIST TEMPLE

Most people have no idea what it takes to set up, in just a half day, to make Makawao Hongwanji's Obon so spectacular.

The hundreds of chōchin lanterns with memorial tags on ropes, the yagura tower where the keiki scatter flowers of welcome during the “Sanbujiō” invocation, the benches around the yagura, the game areas, the food concessions, the tables and chairs, the dressing room for dancers — all set up literally in a matter of hours.



Courtesy of Jean Heselden  
Makawao Hongwanji's Troop 18 Scouts and their Dads made major repairs to the yagura before moving it into position for Obon.

Countless “unseen hands” unselfishly put their time, energy and commitment to plan, prepare, serve, clean up and breakdown the infrastructure.

In the Japanese language and culture, the term “Otsukare sama” acknowledges, recognizes and expresses gratitude to a person or persons who are the “honorable tired person(s)” — in this case, those countless unseen hands that made Obon 2025 possible, beginning with chairperson Jean Heselden who went above and beyond the call of duty, taking over from Sharon and Floyd Nagoshi who served tirelessly for many years.

Jean would be the first to insist that the truly hard work was done by temple members, friends of the temple and especially the judoka and families of the Makawao Hongwanji Judo Club, the Scouts and families of Troop 180, Troop 18 and Pack 18, members of the BWA, the “Manju Ladies,” the “Chow Fun Crew,” the “Sushi Machine” and the greater community including the Maui Police Department, Pukalani Superette, Zenshin Daiko, Maui Taiko, Maui Minyo Kai and many others.

This is the true meaning of the Sangha, the community of communities centered around the temple, the Buddha, the Dharma — Makawao Hongwanji is where you can connect and reconnect with the Three Treasures of Buddhism.

As we pause to reflect upon the “unseen hands” who made Obon 2025 possible on July 26, we realize the Truth of the Oneness of All Life, the Truth of Non-Self — “This unrepeatable life is *not* about ME.”

The practice of Nembutsu Mindfulness of Amida, the Immeasurable, is as simple and difficult as truly experiencing and appreciating the Truth of the Oneness of All Life by consciously and deliberately being mindful of the countless “unseen hands” that make possible not only Obon but also each moment of every day in this unrepeatable life.

If you cultivate this mindfulness at every Obon you attend, your food, drinks and sweets will taste even better because you are filled with humility and the gratitude to the unseen “hands” who made this moment possible.

And if you cultivate this mindfulness of Amida in every moment of every day of your unrepeatable life, your life will be sweeter too!

Namo Amida Butsu



Courtesy of Rev. Kerry Kiyohara  
How many generations of Higuchis does it take to set up lanterns? Three, each with varying reactions: Mom Katie, left, (“Be careful!”), Ojiichan Calvin, (“Pull the rope tighter! Move left!”) and young Tori (“What a view! This is fun!”).



Courtesy of Rev. Daido Baba  
Dancers from the Honoka'a High School Dragons, wearing purple on right; a North Hawaii Bon Dance Club member in red happi coat center, and Kona Hongwanji members on left in blue happi coats, celebrated Obon at Kamuela Hongwanji Mission on Aug. 1.

## Remembering Departed Loved Ones

Two years ago, while serving as an associate minister at Honpa Hongwanji Hilo Betsuin, Rev. Joshin Kamuro had an idea: Wouldn't it be nice if, at the end of Hatsubon service, families who had lost loved ones were presented an uchiwa — a memorial fan?

The fans would be displayed around the temple for about a week leading up to Obon weekend, each adorned with the English and Buddhist names of the deceased, written in graceful calligraphy by Mrs. Minako Kamuro, a shōdo master.

After Hilo Betsuin's Board of Spiritual Affairs (BOSA) approved the plan, the office staff, led by Maya Kondo, invited families to participate. Today, assistant minister Rev. Blayne Nakasone Sakata keeps track of responses, researches names and dates of death.

BOSA chair Dean Kubo made a run to Daiso to buy fans, and Mrs. Kamuro carefully completed her calligraphy.



Courtesy of Honpa Hongwanji Hilo Betsuin  
Left, a stand displays seven of more than 30 uchiwa displayed with names of those who have passed away in the last year. Above, the front of each fan depicts Hilo Betsuin and its banner, “Live in Harmony, Peace and Gratitude.”

During the Hatsubon service, photos of the deceased were shown in a PowerPoint presentation as family members offered *oshoko*.

Then at the close of the service, families received their uchiwa and *kakkocho* (family record book), before they joined in on Obon festivities, carrying fans honoring their loved ones.

Now the resident minister at Mililani Hongwanji, Rev. Kamuro continues to collect photos and Buddhist names for his services there.

“I think I can make uchiwa for Hatsubon families next summer here at Mililani,” he said.

## Festivities Brighten With a Curtain of Lights

An innovation at Honpa Hongwanji Hilo Betsuin caught the eyes of an Oah'u' minister this year, in particular the “Curtain of Lights” being used for messages and announcements.

The brain child of President-Elect Dean Kubo, it began in 2024 as a single five-foot long string of lights, zip tied to a second floor railing. This year another five-foot long unit was added.

Once installed and plugged in, an app on a cell phone controlled the text messages and designs that appear.

Over the last year, the device has improved with 10- and 20-foot long curtains now sold online, a frame to hold the curtain in place is available, different designs can be added to the message and prices have gone down. Or least they did before the tariffs.

Messages of welcome, acknowledgements and the next dance (“Shinran Ono”) made the lights an eye-catching addition to Hilo Betsuin's Obon festivities.



Courtesy of Teri Kubo  
By day, the jury-rigged lights are zip-tied to a railing, left. Above, during a testing phase, Rev. Blayne Nakasone Sakata got two thumbs up.

ties.

“This might be an annual decoration for us,” associate minister Rev. Blayne Nakasone Sakata said.



Courtesy of Yoshiko Umitani

Participants at the Oct. 25, 2025 Minister’s Lay Assistant Retreat were: Seated, front: Rev. Tomo Hojo, left, Bishop Toshiyuki Umitani, Rev. Blayne Higa and Rev. David Fujimoto. Standing, first row, left: Nannette Gantoisi, Shinobu Fukakusa, Wendy Harman, Jackie Furuta, Alan Goto, Dr. Kaethe Kauffman and Brandon Hee. Back row, left: Dean Sakamoto, Irene Nohara, Barbara Brennan, Wayne Yoshioka, Natasha Lopes, Ed Diehl, Pete Doktor, Rod Moriyama, Dexter Mar and Raymond Takiue.

## MLA

Continued from Page 1

provements as we seek to grow the program and ensure it is helping to meet our current and future needs,” Rev. Higa said.

In late August, each active temple on Kaua’i was represented at a half-day long, district-wide Minister’s Lay Assistant Retreat at Lihu’e Hongwanji.

Starting with an explanation of the levels of ministry — from MLA to CMLA, MLA with Tokudo Ordination and the Kaikyoshi/Kyoshi or fully ordained minister — the program covered a wide range of basic subjects without going into deeper details, given the time constraints.

Basic temple etiquette including the proper posture for sitting, standing (*kiritsu*), bowing (*raihai* and *yuhai*), walking and handling Buddhist implements began the session, ending with the proper way to strike the *kansho* or event bell.

Of the 12 members who participated in the retreat, no one decided to participate in the follow-up session two months later, the annual MLA session at Honpa Hongwanji Betsuin. Which is not to say the Kaua’i district temples are not dedicated — only that their efforts are less formal.

Each temple has a core of dedicated volunteers (*hoshu*) — mostly women — who, rain or shine, gather to clean and help set up the altar every Friday morning and are available to do more when their ministers ask for help.

“The MLAs are appointed by the resident minister and are not required to report to Headquarters,” Bishop Umitani said. “We know many dedicated volunteers are not recognized as MLAs but are helping their temples which I appreciate. Their temples’ success depends on the collaborative effort between the resident ministers and the MLAs.”

Largely because Hawai’i is made up of islands— each with its own unique history, population density, social and economic characteristics — the program has evolved depending on the needs of each district.

At Wailuku Hongwanji, for example, Rev. Shinkai Murakami conducts his own training session with temple members who express an interest in assisting him when he is off-island.

“I tried to organize an island-wide Lay Assistant (training) session similar to Kauai’s but there was no interest at that time,” he said.

Wailuku’s program follows a set path: Vandana & Ti Sarana, sutra chanting, an annual Dharma talk, altar safety and recognizing what is each person’s path and goal. Most MLAs at Wailuku still work full-time jobs and have personal, family responsibilities.

### Coming Up

In the March 2026 issue of Ka Leo Kaheā, Dexter Mar recalls his journey from Minister’s Lay Assistant at Honpa Hongwanji Hawai’i Betsuin to his Tokudo Ordination in Kyoto, Japan on Oct. 9, 2025.

At the Kauai retreat, the subject of incense was raised — not only how to offer incense (*oshoko*) but also what to do with the ashes at the end of weeks or months depending on how full the burner.

The four MLAs at Puna Hongwanji consistently help with setting up the altar, dismantling it, ringing the *kansho*, serving as emcees, chanting and delivering the Dharma message when Rev. Satoshi Ka’imipono Tomioka is away.

“One new potential MLA in her 20s is already doing well with the *kansho* and learning altar procedures,” Rev. Tomioka said.

To spread interest in getting members more involved with service procedures, Rev. Tomioka has posted a tutorial on both on Facebook and YouTube on the proper way to ring the *kansho*, demonstrating the opening seven strikes, the crescendo to crescendo, five strikes and so on.

At both Pāhala and Nā’ālehu, which Rev. Tomioka oversees, one person

handles both the altar and *kansho*.

**"We are gearing the program around how to run a Sunday service but we are making some changes and hope we can better improve its quality."**

Rev. David Fujimoto  
Mōi’li’ili Hongwanji  
Mission

The Oct. 25 MLA Retreat at the Betsuin offered six workshop and hands-on, skills-based sessions in a day-long session. It covered Buddhism in general, an explanation of the program, “How to Prepare and Deliver a Dharma Message” and a large portion discussed the status of the program.

“The retreat was sort of a ‘fact-finding’ mission on what exactly is going on in the program and what is going on in the temples, what more needs to be done and how can we, as the ministerial training committee, better manage the program,” Rev. David Fujimoto, Mōi’li’ili resident minister said.

“We are gearing the program around how to run a Sunday service but we are making some changes and hope we can better improve its quality.”

Several of those attending the session were “Observers,” uncommitted to the program and several times, the question of “How can we help you?” was asked of attendees without clear responses or demands.

Oddly, the numbers of committed, trained MLAs and CMLAs don’t necessarily correlate with the size of the temples. Two of the largest temples have fewer MLAs and CMLAs than many of their smaller counterparts.

In the end, no matter how many members and how many MLAs and CMLAs are on board, all involved share the same goals:

To assist the ministers;  
To grow the sanghas, and  
To spread the Dharma.

## Līhu’e’s Strength Grew Out of Members’ Love

When Reverend Yukiko Motoyoshi was assigned to Līhu’e Hongwanji in 1990, members felt like they were getting two ministers for the price of one even though her father, Rev. Sachihide Motoyoshi, was retired.

“He was very chatty and social and Mrs. M. was more reserved, but very pleasant and friendly,” recalled Gladys Fujiuchi, now in her 90s, and an admirer of Mrs. Motoyoshi’s strength and character.

At the time, the temple was a busy, active place where classes filled the days. Besides Japanese language, martial arts and classical dance, there were arts and crafts sessions including *bunka shishu* and sewing classes.

Mrs. Motoyoshi sang in the choir and taught herself how to play the organ when the temple lost its organist.

From August of 1990 to November of 2004, Rev. Yukiko and her sister Akiko lived in Līhu’e until Rev. Yukiko was assigned to Hawai’i Betsuin.

When their father passed away in 2002, the outpouring of support and comfort from the community was indescribable, Rev. Yukiko said. “They went all out for my father’s funeral.”

But two hurricanes were the most unforgettable memories of her tenure at Līhu’e.

“When Hurricane Iniki hit in September of 1992, we didn’t have water for a week,” Rev. Yukiko said.

## Lihue

Continued from Page 1

able service were filled with creativity, dedication and compassion.

“He started Japanese language classes, organized the Fujinkai (women’s association), opened a Sunday School, established the YMBA (the forerunner of the YBA) and even started a kindergarten, 4-H Club, Boy Scouts and a bridal school.”

In those years, ministers traveled to nearby homes, most within 10 miles but some as far as 30 miles either on foot or on horseback, often holding the service at night.

Month after month, Rev. Miyasaki conducted as many as 30 gatherings a month, unwavering in his commitment to spread the Buddha-Dharma.

His years as a Līhu’e Hongwanji minister included three years of incarceration in Santa Fe Camp from 1942-1945.

“Of course, it was not only Rev. Miyasaki but also many ministers and lay members who worked tirelessly to share the teachings throughout the islands of Hawai’i,” Bishop Umitani said.

“We remember Yukito Sakai who protected the temple when the property was occupied during the wartime.

“We remember Rev. and Mrs. Umemura, whose Sunday School work reached beyond the temple to the state level.

“We remember Rev. Terayama and Seiji Kusato who



Courtesy of Līhu’e Hongwanji  
Shown here in a 2004 photo, Rev. Yukiko Motoyoshi looked back on her years at Līhu’e Hongwanji: “The members are one of the best!!”

“We didn’t have electricity for more than two months.

“The Aikido dojo and the Social Hall were damaged but the parsonage and the temple stood firm.

“Ten years earlier, Hurricane Iwa hit Kaua’i in 1982. Both times, the parsonage and the temple survived because they were exceptionally strong.

“One member told me the temple survived because they were built by members’ own hands. Each nail, each wooden frame was hammered with the love that members had for their church.

“I really miss Līhu’e Hongwanji. The members of LHM are one of the best! They are caring, kind and so, so supportive of the minister.”

Rev. Motoyoshi is retired and currently lives in Stockton, California.

organized the hoshakai — a service group of retired men and women.

“The list goes on and on.”  
The light of the Dharma that each pioneer illuminated has been carried forward. Each had their own story, challenges and contributions that helped shape Līhu’e Hongwanji into what it is today — a spiritual home where the teachings of Amida Buddha have been taught, shared, practiced and lived.

“For 125 years, the temple has been a place where people shared joy, laughter, solace and comfort,” Bishop Umitani said. “The 125th anniversary is not only a time to celebrate, but it is also a time to reflect on the work that lies ahead.

“How can we ensure that Līhu’e Hongwanji continues to be a vibrant and meaningful presence for generations to come?

“How can we deepen our understanding of the Dharma and live it in a way that benefits not only ourselves, but all beings?

“We are not alone in this journey.

“With the same spirit of dedication, compassion and wisdom that has carried us to this moment, I am confident we will continue to walk forward together — guided by the light of Amida’s infinite Wisdom and Courage.”

Rev. Shawn Yagi and Temple President Lynne Matsu-mura organized the historic, joyous program which included music, a catered luncheon and games in the Social Hall.

— Gail S. Tagashira

# Gender Neutral Selection Process Opens Up Candidate Pool

*Editor’s Note: After a six-year hiatus during the Covid-19 quarantine, Buddhist Women’s Association resumed its Student Exchange Program this year, supported by honzan’s decision to allow transgender applicants.*

**BY YOSHIKO UMITANI**  
CO-CHAIR, BWA  
FEDERATION STUDENT  
EXCHANGE COMMITTEE

A year ago, when the Hawai’i Federation of Buddhist Women’s Associations discussed 2025’s Student Exchange Program, a member from BWA Hawai’i

raised a good question: Were only biologically female students eligible to apply? Hawai’i’s headquarters and Honzan in Japan forwarded the issue to BWA in Japan and the response was, “If the applicant aligns with the goals of the BWA Student Exchange Program, it does

not matter whether the applicant is biologically female or not.” Since recruitment clearly stated that gender would not be a determining factor, it was not discussed during the selection process. The selection was conducted by two co-chairs of the student exchange committee from the Hawai’i Federation and one representative from each of the five units, a total of seven BWA members.

Applicants were evaluated based on their resumes and essays followed by interviews conducted by seven selection committee members. Two of the highest overall scores were chosen. They were: Lauren Kana Suzuki, a student at Tufts University and Chad Tsuyoshi Okawa, a student at University of Hawai’i at Mānoa. Both were former presidents of the Hawai’i Federation of Jr. YBA while they were in high school and since

then, both continue to be actively involved at their respective temples. The eight-day program included visits to the Hiroshima Peace Park, meeting students from Kyoto Women’s University, sightseeing in Nara, an audience with Lady Ōhtani, then having a homestay at a Japanese BWA member’s house in Toyama and hands-on experience making washi. They recount their experiences in these brief remembrances.

## Chad Okawa: Gratitude and Growth

Although I have been to Japan before, most recently as a participant in YBICSE (Young Buddhist International Cultural Study Exchange), I was eager to return because I felt that this trip was an opportunity to deepen my appreciation of Jodo Shinshu, to learn more about the historical and cultural roots of our tradition and to discover how women’s contributions have sustained our sangha across generations. The first leg of our trip brought us briefly together with this year’s YBICSE group before we parted ways to visit the Hiroshima Peace

Museum, the Children’s Memorial and the Genbaku Dome. While I have visited them before, I left once again in tears, my heart aching from the unimaginable and immense suffering caused by the atomic bomb. And yet, alongside my grief, I felt a deep sense of hope for peace, understanding and a future free from such tragedies. On Day Five in Kyoto, we dressed in our most formal attire, received a briefing on proper protocols and procedures before meeting with Lady Ruzumi Ōthani. I felt nervous because I had the chance to offer a

short musical performance on the shinobue (transverse flute), playing three gathas that I felt represented Hawai’i, the BWA and the Hongwanji. When Lady Ōhtani entered, our worries quickly melted away. Her warm smile and gracious presence immediately put us at ease. I was grateful to have a conversation with a gentleness that made our interaction feel more personal and approachable. We shared our involvement with Hongwanji, Jr. YBA and how BWA continues to support us. Before departing, we expressed our excitement for the 2027 BWA World Convention in Honolulu and shared our hope that she would be able to attend. The final part of our experience

culminated with an unforgettable homestay. After our audience with Lady Ōhtani, we were greeted by Mrs. Sachiko Momoyama, who welcomed us with open arms and helped us navigate the Shinkansen ride from Kyoto to Toyama. For me, the homestay was one of the most memorable parts of the program. We were treated as family, not as visitors. Each activity arranged for us reflected how everyone’s contribution, whether big or small, came together to create a meaningful experience. The first morning, we dressed in yukata and participated in a tea ceremony. Later that night, a temple family welcomed us into their home for a Japanese barbecue, including a fireworks display.

On our final day, we travelled to Echizen where we met with several BWA members for lunch, then designed and created sheets of washi paper. Throughout this homestay, my most cherished memories came from simple moments spent with Mrs. Momoyama and her family — winning a Cinnamoroll plushie at an arcade with her daughter, riding the ferris wheel at an amusement park with her grandchildren, helping pick vegetables from their garden. Looking back on the experience, my hopes were truly fulfilled and even surpassed. The countless acts of kindness, encouragement and gratitude showed me that sincerity and interconnectedness are at the heart of Buddhism.

## Lauren Kana Suzuki: Overcome With Emotion

Before the trip, I had hoped to learn more about Japanese and Buddhist cultures and to better understand Jodo Shinshu Buddhism as a whole. This experience did this for me and more, leaving me overcome with emotions, a mix of contentment, sadness, heartache, nostalgia and inspiration, in the best of ways. In Hiroshima, we talked to one of the atomic bomb survivors whose organization recently won the Nobel Peace Prize. With everything going on in the world, he has not given up hope, but has fought harder for the organization’s goal to not have any more atomic weapons on earth.

Before the homestay portion of the trip, we were briefed before our meeting with Lady Ruzumi Ohtani. It was a little stressful because of the strictness, but from the moment she entered the room, her welcoming nature and happiness were evident. Whether speaking in English or Japanese, she listened carefully to every word and was so engaged. She is the type of person whose presence alone can make a room feel inviting. I asked her what aspect of Buddhism resonates with her the most and she said that the ability to create these meaningful one-on-one connections is what she values. Through our faith,

we are able to talk to and understand each other on a deeper level. Then our homestay Mom, Mrs. Sachiko Momoyama, was the best experience. When she told people we were coming, so many wanted to meet us — even her grandchildren’s friends! All of her own friends and community members wanted to help Chihiro and I to have the best Toyama experience. Four Fujinkai ladies met with us to do a washi paper making workshop, some coming from hours away by car just to be able to spend a few hours with us. Their attentiveness and genuine interest was incredibly kind. To feel the gratitude in people’s actions and words, to hear the chanting, the Dharma messages . . . is unexplainable until you experience it in its entirety.



*Courtesy of Sachiko Momoyama*  
Lauren Kana Suzuki, left, and Chad Chihiro Okawa dressed in yukata before taking part in a tea ceremony on their first day in Toyama where they stayed with BWA member Sachiko Momoyama.

I hope other youth will be able to experience something just as moving, not just be a participant but to go with the intent to learn and be changed.

# The Future Comes Into Focus at 68th Jr. YBA Convention

New leaders emerge at the annual gathering and help chart a path forward

**BY YUMA KAMURO**  
JR. YBA UNITED OF O’AHU  
MILILANI HONGWANJI  
MISSION

More than 50 Jr. YBA members, both in-person and on Zoom, participated in this year’s 68th convention, hosted by the United of O’ahu from June 20-22. Participants gathered at Buddhist Study Center where Bishop Toshiyuki Umitani officiated at the opening service and delivered remarks to welcome participants, encouraging them to “. . . treasure the experience, build



lasting friendships and continue to walk the path of the Nembutsu with joy and confidence.” Over three days, participants took part in discussions to plan for the next fiscal year, held an election to vote on officers for 2025-26 and conducted an essay, oratorical and art contest. United of O’ahu president Yuma Kamuro was judged winner of both the essay and oratorical competitions, writing on “The Silence That Speaks” and delivering a speech on the connection between Buddhism and Hello Kitty, the theme of the convention. In his opening remarks,

Bishop Umitani also raised his initial reaction to the choice of the popular, sweet cartoon character, asking, “What relevance does Hello Kitty have to the Jr. YBA Convention?,” later recalling that when he watched DVDs with his young daughters Naho and Riho, Kitty and her Friends embodied Buddhist values of kindness, friendship and connection. Among the fun activities for those attending in-person included crafting Hello Kitty pizza, assembling onenju, using photo booths and dancing with a DJ providing music after the gathering moved from Mō’ili’ili Hongwanji to Ala Moana Hotel. Stacey Hayashi, filmmaker of, among other movies, “Go for Broke: An Origin Story,” was guest speaker at the banquet finale, delivering remarks on preserving the values of identity and

honoring veterans. By chance, Yuma Kamuro, now a senior at Mililani High School, appeared as an extra in Hayashi’s film as an 11-year-old, an example of “unexpected meetings and the randomness of life,” he said. Both he and Hayashi were both “shocked” when they realized the coincidence. “There were many lessons taught at this event that allowed me to think about Buddhist values and our role in this community,” he said. “I’m looking forward to another year and more to cherish.” Newly elected officers for the coming year are President Madelyn Kaneshiro, Honolulu District; Vice President Diandra Thomson, Oahu District; Secretary Taylor Kunimitsu, Oahu District, and Treasurer Riann Shiro, Hawaii District.

NEWS FROM THE SANGHAS

Tasting Sake, Finding the B.E.S.T. Farm, Following Your Dreams

Here's a brief compilation of news and various activities from around Hawaii temples. Updates of interest may be sent to newsletter@honpahi.org

HAWAII ISLAND

For the second year in a row, **Puna Hongwanji Buddhist Temple** hosted its Sake Tasting and Food Pairing fundraiser. The popular event drew twice as many participants as last year. Even with extra chairs and tables added to the Social Hall, it sold out two months before the Sept. 27 date.

Nine dishes were prepared for 128 guests by temple members. The meal began with a fruit and cheese platter, followed by sashimi. Highlights included homemade gyoza and ramen by Mrs. Haruka Tomioka, takoyaki grilled by Rev. Satoshi Ka'imi'pono Tomioka with Mrs. Tomioka's help and ginger chicken, a specialty of former temple president Clifford Furukado. Dessert was Misaki Saito's Japanese cheesecake.

Ryan Kadota of Kadota Liquors paired sake with each dish. He was assisted by Tassho Pearce, who introduced and explained the origins of every selection. Nā Hōkū Hanohano Award winner Mark Yamanaka, with bassist Sean Naleimaile, provided live entertainment.

Guests were reminded to have designated drivers. No sake was sold at the event; purchases could be ordered and picked up later at Kadota's retail store in Hilo.

Proceeds will support Puna Hongwanji's 125th anniversary celebration in 2026. As guests left, many were already reserving tables for next year's tasting.

More than 20 members and guests of **Kamuela Hongwanji Mission** took part in an outdoor service officiated by Rev. Daido Baba at the B.E.S.T. Farm on Sept. 28.

Established in the 1940s by Tsukasa Yamamoto, B.E.S.T. Farm began by growing food for troops stationed in Waimea during World War II.

Today it is run by third-generation members of the Yamamoto family, who cultivate fruits and vegetables for



Courtesy of Robin Sato

Guests listen to the music of Mark Yamanaka and Sean Naleimaile, above left, at Puna Hongwanji's Sake Tasting and Food Pairing fundraiser on Sept. 27. For the second year in a row, the popular event sold out months in advance.



Courtesy of Marvis Yanagisawa

Rev. Daido Baba, center, conducted Kamuela Hongwanji's Sunday services on the B.E.S.T. farm acreage on Sept. 28.

the Kamuela temple and the larger community.

After the service, participants toured the farm's acreage on RTVs, harvested cabbages and enjoyed a bento lunch prepared by temple members.

**Pāpai'kou Hongwanji** and **Honohina-Papaaloo Hongwanji** pooled their resources to hold a joint Plant and Produce Sale in mid-October, which proved a great success.

In addition to favorites like Spam musubi, chili, andagi and hot dogs, Pāpai'kou's sangha offered homemade poha and 'ōhelo berry jams, taro chips, five kinds of tsukemono, nishime and chicken laulau.

Papaaloo members contributed a bounty of home-grown fruits and vegetables, including papaya, jabon and oranges, while Pāpai'kou members shared lettuce, av-

ocados, persimmons and lemons from their own yards.

"It was wonderful to see our YBA Hall full of people eating and enjoying themselves, and the Pāpai'kou classrooms and parking lot full," said President Alvin Yoshimoto.

O'AHU

For the first time in nearly 40 years, students and staff from Ho'ala School visited **Wahiawa Hongwanji Mission** at the invitation of Rev. Kojun Hashimoto and coordinated by temple vice president Dale Shimaura.

Since the school is closed on Sundays, the *hanamido* was left in place until Monday so students, staff and their families could visit and learn about Hanamatsuri.

Each child brought a flower from the school's garden which happened to be in full bloom, as an offer-



Courtesy of Christopher J. Campisano

ing. They placed their flowers on the display, offered incense and learned about pouring sweet tea over baby Buddha during the *kanbutsue*, or "Bathing the Buddha Ceremony."

Rev. Hashimoto explained the significance of the day, and the keiki sang "Happy Birthday" to Buddha before returning to their classrooms across the parking lot on the Hongwanji grounds to enjoy birthday cupcakes.

While Ho'ala students participate each year in International Peace Day by ringing the bonshō, or large bell, this was the first time most of the children had been inside the temple, said head of school Dr. Christopher Campisano.

"It was a wonderful experience for them and for the faculty," he said. "We look forward to partnering with Wahiawa Hongwanji in future events."

Ho'ala offers a low student-to-teacher ratio from Kindergarten to the 8th grade, emphasizing independent, critical thinking and creativity. They have been tenants on the Wahiawa Hongwanji grounds since 1985.

Khiani Garcia stopped by for a visit.

A former student of the preschool, Ms. Garcia read a story about following one's dreams, then presented each of the 45 keiki with a dream catcher — woven hoops originating from Native American tribes and widely recognized today as symbols of oneness among nations.

Since the start of the school year, the children have been learning how each classmate is special, the importance of kindness and the many different types of families in the world. They also learned a song about being good listeners, taught by Rev. Shawn Yagi.

MAUI

**Wailuku Hongwanji Buddhist Temple** hosted a Court of Honor to recognize seven new Eagle Scouts, the highest rank in scouting.

Their families, fellow scouts and the temple community honored the young men for their service projects and commitment to scouting values.

They were Cody Gima, Zach Kuraoka Skye Curley, Galen Okamoto, Adam Fukunaga, Chase Nozaki and William George.

Scoutmaster Celeste Rabang recognized their achievements and pointed out their leadership and dedication to service still lies ahead.

KAUAI

"Follow Your Dreams" was the lesson **Lihue Hongwanji Mission's** preschoolers learned on September 3 when Miss Hawai'i Filipina

Ringling Their Bells for Peace



Courtesy of Honpa Hongwanji Mission of Hawaii

More than 1,000 participants from throughout the State of Hawai'i and the U.S. mainland took part in Honpa Hongwanji Mission of Hawai'i's annual Ring Your Bell for Peace Day on Sept. 22. An interfaith lineup of musicians and speakers contributed to make this year's program memorable beginning with the blowing of the pū or conch shell and an oli by Kahu Loku'olu Quintero of the Hawai'ian Church of Hawai' Nei. Pastor Janet Morel of the Interfaith Alliance of Maui delivered the invocation followed by a benediction from Rev. Jigaku Takenouchi of Hilo Taishoji Soto Mission. The entire sixth annual program may be viewed on YouTube at <https://honpahi.link/peace25>

Marching With Pride



Courtesy of David Atcheson

Members of Honpa Hongwanji Mission of Hawai'i joined hundreds of other celebrants at this year's Pride Parade from Ala Moana Beach Park through Waikiki to Kapi'olani Park on October 20 as part of LGBTQ+ History Month.