

Strategies for Building Up Salt Lake and BCA Temples

J.K Hirano

I Adaptability and Openness to Change

The Goal is NOT to maintain status quo!

Why would you want to maintain an organization that is currently on a slow downward spiral.

The Goal is to adapt to a changing Sangha and to build a dynamic Dharma Program and temple to share with your community. In the past, our Sanghas were literally blood related families. If not blood related they were often connected through prefectural organizations (kenjin kais) in ties that were extremely close. These families are dispersing in many ways. There are new members coming in that are no longer blood or ethnically related. The goal is to make each member of the Sangha have that same feeling of family for the temple, their Sangha as the original members did.

II Uniqueness

The BCA Kaikyoshi have tried to show “Why Jodo Shinshu?” in the recent pamphlet supported by Bishop Umezu. Now we must implement these ideas into the infrastructure of our temples.

Just as each Kaikyoshi had a little different take on why they chose Jodo Shinshu as their personal spiritual path, each temple in a similar manner, cannot be a cookie cutter copy of one another. Each Kaikyoshi has certain skills or talents such as, music, public speaking, program development, computer skills, which can benefit their temple. This creates a personal flavor to your Sangha.

Our national organization, should take great pride in what we have accomplished, over the past 100 years. We are the oldest Buddhist organization in the United States and have one of the strongest infrastructures of any Buddhist organization. We have a world renown Buddhist Graduate School in the Institute of Buddhist Studies (IBS). We have 63 temples throughout the continental United States. We have a beautiful study center which houses our Buddhist Educational program. It is time that our members buy into the reality that we are each an important part of the Buddhist Churches of America. We have a bright future. Just as our temples polish their naijin on a regular basis, lets now emphasize the need to polish what we have already built and to be encourages and take pride in our accomplishments.

III Emphasis on Strengths, not Weaknesses

Evaluate what your temple has in terms of material assets and Sangha members. What areas can be made more useful or aesthetically pleasing? If you have empty rooms that are just storage closets of refuse from old temple rummage sales, clean them out. If your temple is in need of paint and a bit of clean up, get a group of volunteers to help paint and clean. First impressions by visitors to our temples are very important. If your temple is run down, why would anyone want to become a part of your Sangha? Are there members with special skills that can create your “dream Sangha?” We have lawyers, doctors, gardeners, business owners,

engineers, teachers, artists and musicians at each of our temples. Utilize their skills to enhance your Sangha.

What would be the ideal temple in your area? What is your dream temple. (I was asked this by the LDS [Mormon] Foundation) when I went to ask them for donations for rebuilding my temple in Salt Lake.

A few months ago, Dr. Kent Matsuda, President of BCA visited Salt Lake City Buddhist Temple for the first time. It was during the Parliament of World Religions in October 2015. He was shocked and asked me how we have been able to maintain such a wonderful temple in Salt Lake City, Utah. He told me that our temple should be a goal and ideal for all BCA temples. He asked me to write about what my view or vision was for the Salt Lake Buddhist temple. At that time, I came up with these three points that I believe to be the foundation for our Salt Lake Buddhist Temple and all the Buddhist Churches of America temples to survive. In creating these three points, I tried to think about what and why I did certain things in Salt Lake to develop our temple.

On my arrival to Salt Lake in 1993 these were the basic demographics of our temple:

urban

small membership

one building with a gym and very little land.

Membership demographics: majority Japanese American, probably the temple's membership was 60 percent Nisei, 10 percent Issei, 20 percent Sansei and the remainder non Japanese, when I came to Salt Lake City in 1993. At that time the Dharma School was fewer than 20 students. The membership was mostly Nisei and Sansei about the same as the current membership of about 150-200 members or about 100 families.

Assets: one building with a gym. There was about \$75,000.00-\$100,000.00 in the temple's financial accounts. This was from the selling of the temple's parsonage for about \$35,000.00 in 1992.

Having been raised as a member of the Salt Lake Buddhist temple, I thought there were going to be difficulties with coming back to my home temple. I was told by the Japanese Christian Church minister to not plan on staying very long. He had told me that he returned to his home church in California and they fired him within two years. Looking back at the past twenty-three years, I have found that my knowledge and familiarity with the local culture and the temple members have been a great advantage for me as Kaikyoshi (HongANJI assigned resident priest).

When I returned to Salt Lake I had strong support from some of the senior members of the board. Besides my family, Mitsuru and Terry Fujinami, Ichiro and Takeko Doi and Kay and Chiyoko Terashima especially come to mind and were so understanding and made it feel so good to have come home. These Nisei were extremely open minded and supportive of my goals for the temple. They saw that the temple needed to change to survive. They often let it be known to all the membership that my job was to guide the temple with a joint vision. The board's purpose was to keep the temple financially able to support this vision. I believe this is the attitude that is essential for any temple to succeed. The Kaikyoshi must accept this responsibility with great humility and gratitude and should work with the Board. A temple can only succeed with the Board and Kaikyoshi being on

equal and collaborative terms, not an employee- employer relationship. It is very much a team effort with no one member irreplaceable.

When I came back, I realized the first area I needed to work on was to develop a Dharma School program that would bring the younger families back to the temple. I recruited a group of Dharma School teachers that had experience in the Public School system. I was lucky to find about 7 teachers that were Public School teachers. This was actually the reason I initially thought I would come back to Salt Lake. When I was at the San Jose Buddhist Church Betsuin, I came back to Salt Lake for the funeral service for Mr. Nobuzo Endo, the father of our current temple president Stan Endo. At the burial service, I heard very young Lisa Endo ask her father Stan, "Are we going to leave Grandpa here in the ground?" It was the question of a somewhat frightened child. Salt Lake had not had a minister for about three years. So I thought to myself, there is no one in Salt Lake to teach the children about the beauty of Buddhism. When this temple closes, I believed that a large majority of the children would probably join the LDS church or not have any religion, so when I was asked by the Bishop if I would consider returning, I was happy to do so.

My first priority was to develop a Dharma School. I explained to these new Dharma School teachers that my primary goal for this Dharma School was that I wanted to make the Dharma School a place where kids wanted to come on Sundays and would proudly tell their friends, "I am a Buddhist." This is a big thing when Utah has a majority religion (Mormons). More than just focusing on D and D (doctrine and dates) I wanted the students to be happy at this temple. To buy into the idea that this was their temple and they could be proud to be a part of it.

I gave the teachers an outline of what I would talk about throughout the year. They would make fun lessons to match up to these areas. An example, "Because Autumn physically represented change, I would talk a lot about impermanence." It is interesting that the biggest hindrance to growth within the Dharma School was a teacher that was not willing to change their method or lesson plan. I had a number of members quit, because their children no longer wanted to come to Dharma School because they would have that particular teacher. Although there were some difficulties in this change of attitude, within ten years we were able to have a Dharma School enrollment at its peak of 110 students. Currently we are now at a low point with about 30 or 40 students. We also have Dharma School parents, with babies and preschoolers beginning to attend who were from the original Dharma school students when I first arrived 20 years earlier.

With a group of core families now attending the temple on a regular basis, I had to establish a group or semi organization that was willing to put in the time to regrow the temple, to get some funds to run things. This group came to be known as the Dharma School Building Fund. It is not to be affiliated with any other organization and their sole purpose was to raise money to help the temple. The person I asked to lead this group was Sherrie Sueoka Koga, my sister's sister-in-law. It helps to have family near by.

As a result of the increase in Dharma School attendance, many of the older members were happy and began to see a need for a larger facility. This began the idea of building a new temple. We started a fund raising program, somewhat separate from Sherrie's group. With such a small membership it was difficult to raise the 4 or 5 million dollars that was needed to build a new temple in a different location. There was also resistance to moving from the current location. In the end we were only able to raise about 2 million dollars. We stayed in the area, had it renamed Japantown Street by the City.

With the money raised for a new temple, we bought an adjacent building to develop for classrooms and other educational programs. This took a little over ten years to establish. It took another ten years to refurbish both buildings.

Currently, the Nisei group at the temple is down to about twenty to thirty members. From those families that came back to the temple, there is still a core group of about 30-40 Sanseis and Yonseis who are fully dedicated and have embraced this temple as “Their Temple.”

During the first ten years of this developmental period of my time at the temple, there were many non Japanese who were beginning to come to the temple. They asked about Buddhism and meditation. To be honest, I knew very little about meditation. I believe the Kaikyoshi must constantly study not only Buddhism, but other religions and other aspects of the culture they are living in. The Kaikyoshi must continually study and keep up with their Sangha and their diverse cultural backgrounds. Therefore, I began to study Zen, so I could understand what the fascination with meditation was. To accomplish this, I went to the Zen Center in Salt Lake for about two years studying with the head disciple of the Abbott Genpo Roshi. His name was Anton Tenkei Coppins Sensei.

At the same time, I also realized that in Utah, 80 percent of the people visiting and becoming interested in the temple were previously Mormon. Although I didn’t take formal classes, I began to study Mormon Doctrine and Christianity. Although I was raised in Salt Lake, I felt a need to have a deeper understanding of our local culture. It is extremely difficult to come to the temple when you have no cultural or religious connections. I believe it is an extremely brave act to just come to our temples from the street. I began to recognize how much of an effort it was for a new person to even visit. And when they came to my temple, I felt I needed to speak in their vernacular, to explain our Buddhist ideas within their Christian understanding.

The Kaikyoshis’ job is to make the Dharma relevant to the community they find themselves in. I believe the way for us to do this is mainly through Dharma Talks, writing articles and classes. At about this time, I met and married Dr. Carmela Javellana. Carmela is an integrative psychiatrist, former Catholic and devout Zen Buddhist. She told me how she had never heard of Jodo Shinshu and why this was the case. Together we then began to focus on getting the word out to the community about Jodo Shinshu and our temple and work on really welcoming visitors to the temple. At about this time, Bishop Ogui was beginning the Minister’s Assistants Program.

MAP program in Salt Lake

In the past, minister friends and I had joked about a “Tokudo Army.” These are lay members trained to teach at our temples and to help take care of the myriad things difficult for one Kaikyoshi to manage. Although I first thought it was a dream, I knew a program like this had the potential to help temples in a number of ways. I don’t believe it is necessary for minister assistants to receive ordination, but it doesn’t hurt. The robes that have been created for the Minister’s Assistants are sufficient for the public and especially new visitors to recognize them as a person with some religious authority and not just a nice church lady or man.

I recognize that there have been some resistance to this program at the BCA level, but temples that properly train and use the assistants have all found it to be a positive experience. Minister’s assistants do not replace Kaikyoshi, but supplement what the

Kaikyoshi can do. I could not supervise three temples, serve as the Chairperson of the BCA minister's Association, Board of Trustees for the Institute of Buddhist Studies, board member of the Salt Lake Interfaith Roundtable and instructor for the Honganji International Correspondence course without minister's assistants.

I have four minister's assistants here in Salt Lake. I have given each of them a specific role.

*Rev. Masami Hayashi has Tokudo and Kyoshi and is a graduate of IBS. However, he is 92 years old. I have him help with the services I cannot attend to. He is also a Shodo (Calligraphy) Instructor. He teaches some classes on Shodo. He takes care of all the Homyos and Kakocho and the Eitaikyo names for the temple.

*Dr. Carmela Javellana, my wife has received Tokudo and helps in most of my educational vision for the temple. She leads the weekly meditation service on Sunday at 9:00 am, supervises a meditation class on Wednesday nights, and often co-teaches Buddhist classes and discussion groups with me. She also serves on the Salt Lake Interfaith Board of Directors as I do.

*Ms. Dot Richeda helps Carmela, but her main function is to make sure any visitor to the temple feels welcomed. She explains and demonstrates service protocol and answers any questions about the temple. She also works with Carmela in a new member orientation class we hold.

*Mr. Troy Watanabe was my minister's assistant before there was any such program. His responsibility is the youth. He is in charge of all YBA activities and helps with the Dharma School.

Prognosis: I believe our temple is adjusting to the lack of a large Asian or Buddhist population. We are trying to develop ways that will grow our diversifying Sangha. We are currently brainstorming new avenues for fundraising and bringing awareness to the temple. I have explained to the non-Nikkei members that this temple was established by the Japanese American community in Salt Lake City and the funds that run it have been donated for 100 years by these families. It is entrenched in Nikkei culture. However, that does not preclude them from establishing new forms of fund raising.

One of my biggest gambles in this fund raising area was to establish a book store. There have previously been no Buddhist bookstores or Japanese gift shops in the Salt Lake area. Because Sherrie Koga had done so extremely well in raising money for our temple through various activities, I asked her if she was willing to expand these activities into a real store for the temple. I still believe that this may be a big help for our temple. I am extremely grateful for Sherrie Koga and her group of volunteers. They do not receive any type of monetary pay for all their activities, yet tirelessly work for our temple. This is something I could never do on my own.

However, the only true reason for our temple is to provide a place for people to listen to and learn about the Buddhist teachings. Most of us from Utah are familiar with the L.D.S. missionary program and have heard of the many Christian missionary programs throughout the world. Although contemporary Buddhism does not have missionaries, Buddhist temples are essentially Buddhism's missionary programs. We do not tell others that our religion is the one true religion; however, for those who want to hear the Dharma, it is our prerogative to provide opportunities and venues for this to happen. This is why the educational programs of our Buddhist Churches of America are at the heart of who and what we are.

Personally, I have been very lucky to have married Carmela. Our temple has benefitted in many ways. Much of the diversity at our temple is a direct result of Carmela's efforts in leading meditation. Her Zen Buddhist background has provided our temple with the ability to develop a meditation program. Besides the meditation service on Sundays, we have a weekly meditation class that teaches a variety of meditation techniques. We have five rotating teachers: Dr Carmela Javellana-Hirano, Dr. Robert Weizel, Dr. Stephen Proskauer, Ms. Pam Lancaster, and Mr. Jorgen Olsen. Carmela coordinates and supports them in differing ways (dinner out, attending each other's classes.) These classes are on a donation basis. Although the teachers are experienced in Zen meditation, Naikan therapy and psychotherapeutic forms of meditation, which are all taught in this class, the format is patterned after Rennyō's "Ondobo Ondogyo" – fellow travelers on the Nembutsu path. The meditation *service* on Sunday is to supplement the primary Jodo Shinshu services and religion. As Carmela puts it, it is the "appetizer" for the Dharma School Service "main course," followed by a discussion group for "dessert". The adult study group is just the continuation of the Dharma School classes, but for adults. Rev. Masao Kodani, one of my primary mentors has said that one of the biggest mistakes of the Buddhist Churches of America is to put so much emphasis on children's Buddhist education without providing adult education, which has resulted in a Sangha of adult members with children's level of Buddhist education. I have hoped that this Adult Study class will help us undo this mistake.

Carmela has also led a number of one-day Naikan retreats at our temple. I have recently heard that there were members of our temple who thought Naikan retreats were to support Carmela's personal psychiatric practice. It may have been my fault for not explaining better, but Naikan at our temple is a direct result of my feelings about Naikan and Carmela is supporting my educational vision. I will not get into Naikan theory, however our BCA ministers were introduced to Naikan by Mr. Gregg Krech, the leader of the Naikan movement in the U.S. as the Director of the Todo Institute in Vermont. Rev. Marvin Harada and I both were impressed with the vocabulary and methodology of the Naikan therapy as bringing great potential in introducing Jodo Shinshu to Americans. We both wondered how to get Naikan into our temples. I came back from this workshop very excited and asked Carmela if she would be willing to study it. I didn't have time to study Naikan and I believed a counseling background would be very beneficial to Naikan. She agreed to take classes and attend retreats at the Todo Institute to be certified as a Naikan therapist. She then asked a number of temple members who were also professional counselors to also begin training in Naikan. Carmela and her nonprofit group Anjali Foundation USA helped to pay for their training, not our temple. Now these temple members are capable of leading Naikan retreats and have been assisting Carmela. These are all volunteers. The purpose for Naikan retreats is to have another avenue for the temple to raise funds and serve as a vehicle to teach Jodo Shinshu ideas, with a secular vernacular. The only aspect we have asked the temple to help with is facilities and assistance from other temple volunteers.

As I stated, Buddhist education is the heart of all Buddhist temples. Although the community that may develop around it is wonderful, without Buddhist education temples are nothing more than community centers. I fully realize that a temple needs funds to pay for the various expenses including my salary and benefits. However, if education is not the purpose of a temple, we must ask ourselves, then why do we need a temple?

Our current temple is now about 20 percent Nisei, 50 percent sansei and 30 percent non Asian. However, the weekly service averages about 80-100 people. The racial breakdown is 50 percent Asian and 50 percent non Asian. As a result, our temple is trying to raise funds and increase the temple membership. The Issei and Nisei have been very generous members. I don't know if the Sansei, Yonsei and Non Japanese are aware of the temple's financial predicament. However, it is time that we ask ourselves if you believe there should be a Buddhist temple in Salt Lake City. We have been here for over 100 years as a result of the efforts and *dana* of so many individuals and families. Buddhism teaches us that all things change. There may or may not be a need for Jodo Shinshu Buddhism in Salt Lake. Nevertheless, I believe that Salt Lake deserves a temple and I hope all of you will support us in this noble endeavor. Namo Amida Butsu.