

LIVING MESSAGE

January 1975

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The Coptic church

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Vol. 86 No. 1

Associated Church Press
Established 1916

Member 1975

Published by
THE ANGLICAN CHURCH OF CANADA

Editor: Mrs. Rita Baker

Business Manager: Mrs. B. Hillis

The Living Message
Box 820, Petrolia, Ontario N0N1R0

Advertising: M. C. Lye
207 Queen's Quay W., Ste. 310 A,
Toronto, Ontario M5J1A7

416-364-9905

Subscription rate: \$2.00 per year

Second Class Mail Registration No. 0373.

Printed by: The Advertiser-Topic
Petrolia, Ontario.

Inside Front

Our TV set suffers from several recurring ailments. For long intervals our family exists, ignorant of the adventures of current heroes and unaware of the unfolding sagas of the new season.

Substituting for this entertainment is a kind of family enrichment program. Someone blows the dust from the bookshelves and indulges in hours of nostalgic reading of old classics. Book reviews are scanned as others catch up with the best seller list. Suddenly we're all singing around the piano after dinner. The broken guitar string is replaced. The youngest produces a toy drum, the kitchen is raided for pots, pans and wooden spoons, and a percussion band is formed. Everyone seems to find a new hobby. During weekends, puppet plays and other performances, complete with program, sound effects and refreshments, are staged. (I remember ushering a visitor into our living room to find that it had been converted into a set for a play, with a piece of dingy burlap draped across the middle of the room for the back-cloth, and a sign proclaiming 'Hot Dog Saloon' over the fireplace!)

Our family life becomes an echo of the Victorian days before the miracles of technology. There's time for talking and the house is full of laughter and tears and people to listen to both.

Most of us have taken modern amenities for granted. But warning murmurs are beginning to make themselves heard. The stewardship of our natural resources has become a vital issue. We are more than ever aware of the problems of the Third World. A friend who accurately forecast Canada's present economic state, not by the stars, but with intelligent thinking, has a new set of dire predictions for the next ten years. "Unless", she says, "we settle for less, share more, do something about conservation."

We're becoming used to these expressions; hardened to them, because we don't really want to settle for less; not when it means a personal sacrifice, like not having a car, or new clothes, or a roast of beef.

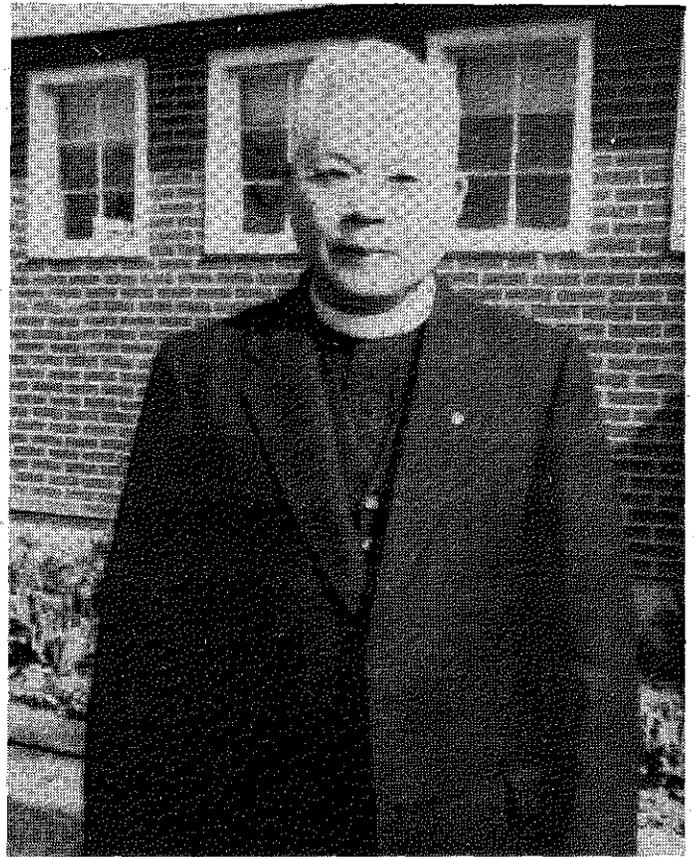
But would it be such a bad thing, this settling for less? Could it be that a return to a more simple life would produce more fellowship, more listening, an enriched family life, more creativity? Wouldn't we be healthier with less food, more walking? Wouldn't international tensions be eased if we shared more with the Third World?

The warnings about our future should not go unheeded, but they need not cast gloom over this new year. By settling for less we may find that what we have is infinitely greater.

The Rev. Gordon G. Nakayama

The Only One

A gentle man
who at 74
and after
a lifetime
of service
is irreplaceable



In the small farming town of Coaldale, a community of four thousand people near Lethbridge, Alberta, there lives a most amazing gentleman.

'Gentle man' is a most apt description of Canon Gordon G. Nakayama, who is pastor of the Anglican families of a large area. It extends from Brooks in the north, to Fort McLeod and Cardston in the west, and Medicine Hat in the east.

Of Canon Nakayama's two hundred parishioners in Coaldale, approximately half of them are Japanese speaking, and Father Gordon, as he likes to be called, very often must use a Japanese-English prayer book for his services. At seventy-four years of age, and long overdue for retirement, he must carry on with his pastoral duties, as no substitute can be found for him. His Japanese name, given at birth, 'Goichi', means 'only one', and he was most appropriately named.

To explain the presence of Father Gordon and his ever increasing flock of Japanese Anglicans in Coaldale, we must go back to the year 1919, when Goichi Nakayama, a devout Buddhist, arrived from Kyoto to stay with Methodist relatives in Vancouver, and to study medicine.

Goichi had worked his way through high school by selling newspapers, and now his indomitable courage had brought him to Canada at the age of

eighteen to continue his education.

Within a year Goichi became converted to Christianity and was baptised 'Gordon' at the Japanese Methodist church in Vancouver. As if to test Gordon's new faith, he was sorely tried during the next few years. When his health failed, he had to abandon his plans to become a doctor, and for eight years he taught at a Japanese language school. During that time he met and married Lois Masui Yao, an Anglican missionary and teacher. He saw greater truths in Lois's Anglican beliefs, and in 1929 he was confirmed, and entered Theological College for five years.

In 1934, Father Gordon was ordained and, as he had been working at the Third Avenue Mission in Vancouver, he stayed on until 1942, during which time the new Church of the Ascension was built, and the Nakayamas were blessed with a son and a daughter.

In 1942, and with the outbreak of hostilities with Japan, it seemed as though all the Nakayamas's efforts had been in vain. Twenty-three hundred Japanese Anglicans were sent to Custodial Camp in Slocan City, B.C., and Father Gordon and his family went with them. The hardships that the 'aliens' suffered were tremendous, and many would have lost their faith in God without the Nakayamas' love, help and understanding.

Seeking to bring one more soul to God, he gives his message with simplicity and a deep concern for all

In 1945, Father Gordon was released and sent to southern Alberta, and the family decided to settle in Coaldale and try to minister from there to his wide spread flock. For a while they lived in two rooms above a store; then a house was purchased. Although it measured only fourteen by twenty feet, it had to serve both as a home for them and as a church for the three other Anglican families in the town.

As was inevitable, under the influence of Father Gordon's attractive personality and his happy, shining faith, the congregation soon increased. When larger premises were required Father Gordon remembered an old kindergarten building lying idle back in Slocan City. He arranged and paid for the dismantling, shipping and reassembling of the building. When it had been painted it became the Church of the Ascension, named after his other church in Vancouver, and remained so until a new one was built ten years later. Most unusually, when the new church was finished, there was no outstanding debt on it.

It was in 1946 that Father Gordon's life underwent a tremendous change. He was convinced that he must become a missionary. He travelled extensively in Canada and the U.S.A., and in 1949 he visited Japan. 1951 saw him on Okinawa Island, helping to establish a church there. His first convert on Okinawa became a bishop and four others became priests. In 1955 he was appointed Vicar of Coaldale, and was later Rural Dean of Lethbridge. In 1966 he became Canon of St. Paul of the Cathedral Church of the Redeemer, Calgary.

Over the years, Father Gordon has published sixteen books in Japanese, as well as many articles and pamphlets; and has broadcast Gospel messages from many countries.

With devout faith in God's help he undertook, at more than seventy years of age, two tremendous missionary journeys that totalled seventy-four thousand miles, and would have tested the endurance of a man fifty years his junior. The first journey lasted five months. He visited the U.S.A., Mexico, South America, South and East Africa, Egypt, Greece, and several European countries.

His second trip was considerably more taxing for him. His heart was weak, and he required the services of doctors several times. In spite of this, Father Gordon visited Hawaii, New Zealand,

Australia, Indonesia, India, Thailand, the Philipines, China, Taiwan, Japan and Korea. Always he wishes to 'bring one more soul to God', but always that one more soul does not satisfy him.

During 1974, Father Gordon continued his missionary work in Canada, and along the way visited the former city of Galt, now Cambridge, Ontario, where he was enthusiastically welcomed at St. David's church. The Canon and the St. David's A.C.W. have been Prayer Partners for six years, and he has corresponded with them through Mrs. Kathleen Hanson, but this was the first time that they had met.

Father Gordon delighted his audience with the simple sincerity of his speech and the beautiful slides he showed of various countries he has visited. He also told of two intensely spiritual experiences. The first which inspired his conversion was in church on Good Friday in 1920. The second was in 1969, while all alone in the Rocky Mountains. Of both he spoke in a quiet yet deeply moving manner, which left his listeners in no doubt of his firm faith in God.

Yet, along with his simplicity, he has a dignity of bearing and a deep concern for the feelings of others.

When the Canon is not travelling he is writing, for he refuses to consider himself as even semi-retired, saying only that he has been 're-treaded'. Their son, Timothy, is now Canon Timothy Nakayama, Rector of St. Peter's Episcopal church in Seattle, Washington. Their daughter, Joy Kogawa, is a published poet and a teacher. Some of her poems betray the fact that she was deeply affected by the trials endured by the Japanese interned during the war; they have left unseen wounds on her heart.

The Nakayamas have six grandchildren, of whom they are immensely proud. Recently, both children and grandchildren had good reason to be prouder than usual of Father Gordon and Lois: A letter was received by them, sent from the Prime Minister's office and signed by Mr. Trudeau. In it they are commended for their 'many years of dedicated and unique service together in witness to their faith among Japanese and Occidental Canadians'.

Despite this recognition from Ottawa; despite many meetings with persons of authority on all continents, the Canon will always be, as he claims, 'a simple, country parson' at heart.

Sheila V. White