

A Brief History

Christ Episcopal Church – Sei Ko Kai San Francisco

Christ Church is a diverse, welcoming, and inclusive Christian community located in Pacific Heights near the Fillmore and Japantown neighborhoods of San Francisco. Our ministry includes singles, couples, families, and children of all ages and reflects the international diversity of our great city.

Founded in 1895 by the Nippon Sei Ko Kai (The Anglican Church of Japan), Christ Church was initially a mission to provide support and community for Japanese coming in large numbers to build new lives in the United States near the beginning of the last century. These *Issei*, first-generation immigrants, were the founders of the Japantown communities in the West. Five years after its founding, Christ Church was adopted as an Episcopal church into the Diocese of California.

Our early history reflects the stories of the struggles of the *Issei* and their children, the second-generation *Nisei* as they built and re-built a small community in the midst of a greater culture of Alien Land Laws and racism towards Asian immigrants. Leadership of Christ Church during this period included Japanese and Japanese-Americans who heroically sustained their church by overcoming the prejudices of not only the community, but the greater Church.

During World War II, much of the congregation was incarcerated, along with many of Japanese ancestry living in the West, to Topaz, Utah, and other “relocation centers” further inland. Following the War, members of the Christ Church community returned to San Francisco and re-founded Christ Church with the leadership of The Rev. Joseph Tsukamoto, who served as Vicar of Christ Church for over 20 years. In 1952, the community moved from the Japantown/Western Addition neighborhoods to our present location at 2140 Pierce Street at Clay.

Since the 1960’s, waning Japanese immigration, the aging *Nisei* generation, and the movement of Japanese-Americans out of the Japantown region has posed ever-greater challenges to Christ Church’s mission. In recent years, Christ Church has slowly been transitioning towards a more diverse, multi-cultural community. Today, we include members from Bulgaria, Taiwan, the Midwest, Hawaii, and Japan. Our unique role in the Diocese of California is our ongoing language ministry with Japanese immigrants. We also continue our ties with the Japantown community through the Soko Bukai, the consortium of Japanese-American churches in San Francisco, and the Japanese American Religious Federation. Our present challenge is remaining relevant and deepening our Christian identity in the diverse and rapidly changing environments of The Fillmore, Pacific Heights, and Japantown, San Francisco. Part of our meeting that challenge is our ongoing partnership with Alta Plaza Preschool, the Integral Counseling Center, and the St. James Episcopal community.

The Christ Church community celebrates our heritage with our two annual fundraisers and outreaches: Our Summer Frolic, a festival of music and good food in the early summer; and our Sukiyaki Dinner, our renowned October event that has been an annual favorite for the neighborhood and region for over 53 years.