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CHINESE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA

**A PICTORIAL HISTORY OF
THE CATHOLIC CHINESE CENTER
IN LOS ANGELES CHINATOWN, 1940 - 1990**

By Sister Noemi Crews and Timothy Chan
with Introduction by Ruby Ling Louie

Introduction

Church missions have consistently played a part in the history of urban Chinatowns in America. Along with the family associations, they helped with the necessary social services not yet formally provided. And along with the public schools, the missions offered a first contact to Western life, a new language and hopefully a new faith. Some initial mission services to the community included a place for gathering, survival English for adults and an enticing Chinese language and culture class for the young to learn and to keep their Chinese heritage.

In the late 1930's, the United States was coming out of the Great Depression. Abroad, China was hard at war with Japan. War relief fundraising efforts in America by both Americans and Chinese brought together the two groups under a common cause. Traditionally, there was a strong affinity for the Chinese among Western missionaries who had lived and worked in China for generations and who were forced now to leave.

To such missionaries coming to Los Angeles, the Chinese population would appear quite scattered with the multiethnic central city area. The new Union Station building had displaced the Chinese residential sections and part of the commercial sections of Old Chinatown east of Alameda Street. Some residents and establishments moved south to the Chinese area near the Produce Market. Others remained and relocated in the surrounding area. Many of these Chinese found new opportunities in the opening of not one but two pioneer tourist attractions - New Chinatown and China City.

By this time, the L.A. Chinatown church missions were at various stages of development. The earliest Congregational Church had long moved and established itself in the Market area. The Presbyterian store front mission in Old Chinatown was forced to relocate on East Adams, while the Methodist mission found another store front between the two new tourist areas. A flourishing Chinese Baptist church was to appear a decade later. But a Catholic Chinese mission was about to begin in Chinatown.

Unlike other local missions, St. Bridget's Catholic Chinese Center began with several unique challenges. First, the central city already included three other major ethnic Catholic churches as well as two established Catholic schools. Within blocks there was St. Peter's serving the Italians, St. Anthony's serving the Croatians, and the main Plaza church serving the Spanish speaking. Secondly, the Center's location, wedged between St. Peter's Cathedral High School and the Pasadena Freeway, would ever preclude its physical growth. And finally, the foreign garb of the Anglo priest and nuns would be a major deterrent to the initial reception of this church mission by the Chinese community.

However, the Center was to be blessed with inspired founders and committed Chinese parishioners, who would establish and maintain an official place and presence representing all Chinese Catholics in Los Angeles. For our Golden Anniversary in Los Angeles Chinatown, we are proud to share a pictorial history of St. Bridget's Catholic Chinese Center. Sister Noemi Crews of the Immaculate Heart Community, who has donated her three albums to the Chinese Historical Society of Southern California, has kindly offered to recapture the beginnings of the Center. And Timothy Chan, our volunteer Liturgical Director, has added an overview of the Catholic Chinese Center today. This singular history is offered in hopes that the Gum Saan Journal will one day collect other local church histories to determine their combined impact upon the Chinese in Los Angeles.

The Beginning Years

In 1939, Father John Cowhig met Bishop Paul Yu Pin in San Diego. The Bishop was currently on tour in the United States, pleading for funds to help Chinese soldiers and refugees fleeing from the Japanese in Manchuria. Father Cowhig was a missionary from China, who had been brought back to the United States because of poor health. He was anxious to start a mission for the Chinese in San

Diego, and wanted the support of the Bishop. The Bishop said that the need for a Catholic Mission was greater in the Los Angeles area, and suggested that Father contact Archbishop Cantwell. This he did, and was given the faculties to operate in this city.

By terms of the contract made between the Archdiocese and the Columban Fathers, Father Cowhig was to receive no salary from the mission. Like St. Paul, the tentmaker, he was to earn his own living while he served the Chinese, so he lived and worked for the Christian Brothers as counselor to them and their students, at Cathedral High School next door. To get further support for his Mission, he contacted the Ladies Auxiliary of the Ancient Order of Hibernians to help him, and he became their official chaplain on June 10, 1942.

As soon as Father had official approval to go ahead, he made a demographic study of the Chinese population and decided on two areas in which to work. He chose the present site on the north end of Chinatown as the seat of his activities, and a location on the east side, as a secondary base. The present building located at 510 Cottage Home Street, was erected in 1940, and the first Mass was celebrated on Christmas Day.

On the east side, Father was able to purchase, with Diocesan funds, a house, at 900 East 22nd Street. After two years, that site was abandoned, as the Chinese in that area were being victimized, and were moving out as soon as they could afford to do so. This also allowed Father to devote all of his efforts to his now successful Chinese language school.

Father Cowhig knew that unless he started a language school, his entrance into the Chinese community would be very slow. He was able to secure the services of Dr. Stanley Chan, a scholar from Canton with a Master's Degree from Stanford. Dr. Chan was then completing a Ph.D. in political science at the same university. He was a convert to Catholicism, and was as interested as Father was in sharing his faith with the Chinese people. He agreed to work in the school for \$100 a month. This was not enough to support his family, however, so Father introduced him to the Jesuits at Loyola University, who were happy to hire him to teach Oriental Studies and Political Science. As the enrollment grew, Father retained the services of Mr. George T.M. Ching, later president of Cathay Bank, and his wife. Mr. Ching was the son of the Chinese ambassador to Mexico. Incidentally, their daughter Deborah Ching is the present Director of the Chinatown Service Center.

With this outstanding faculty, the school was a great success. The first two students increased to eighty, and classes had to be moved to Cathedral High School. They were held from 4:00 to 6:00 p.m. every school day, and every morning during summer session. Father Cowhig encouraged the young people to come back in the evening for sports activities. A club was organized, officers elected, and teams chosen to compete with other groups.

Evelyn Jung, one of the language students, asked if she could become a Catholic. Father decided that it was time to start regular instruction classes and approached Mother Eucharria, head of the Immaculate Heart Sisters, asking for a Sister to teach Evelyn one day during the week and for two Sisters to teach every weekend. For the Saturday assignment, he asked specifically for a Sister who could teach dramatics and manage a youth club for recreational purposes on Saturdays, as well as for religious instruction on Sundays.

The Immaculate Heart Sisters had previously been involved with the Chinese children. Father John Clarke, in charge of religious summer schools in the Archdiocese, had asked them to conduct classes at the Queen of Angels Grammar and High School, formerly on Hill Street, in the summer of 1939. Sisters Gertrude and Zita were assigned, as they lived at the convent attached to the school. In 1941, when the Chinese Center was already built, Sisters Gerard and Julia taught religion and singing. It was customary to pay the Sisters at the end of summer school, but Mother Eucharria offered the services of the Immaculate Heart Sisters free. During the entire time of their involvement, from 1939 until 1951, except for one year, when Father paid \$50 a month, this agreement lasted.

I, Sister Noemi Crews, had been a professional actress before I entered the convent. As it happened, Ben Piazza, an agent for RKO, and the friend who inspired Evelyn Jung to become a Catholic, was the agent who first hired me and my sister, Norma, known in religion as sister Mary Joseph. We had produced many plays in the parochial schools of Los Angeles. At this time, I had just obtained my Master's Degree in English at UCLA, and was teaching English and Public Speaking at Immaculate Heart College, besides producing the Shakespearean plays being taught in classes by Frayne Williams.

I was sent to live and teach at Queen of the Angels Convent and School, which was only about six blocks from the Catholic Chinese Center, so it was very convenient to walk there every day for

classes.

Father's first instruction on that June day in 1942, was to just sit on the porch and let the children get used to seeing us there on their way to language school. Sister Francella was my partner for the summer, and a few courageous youngsters came in after language school to make our acquaintance. Sister taught piano, and I began a class in dramatics. We really did not accomplish much that summer. Attendance was irregular, but we did make a few permanent friends, a nucleus for the youth club to come.

One of our pupils, Lilly Mu (now of Lilly Enterprises), did us a great favor. She took us on a tour of the new Chinatown, and what was left of the old one. She changed scowling faces into smiling ones when she introduced us as her teachers. Father Cowhig was very worried when he found out where we had gone, as he, personally, had been warned to stay out of the area. But we came back alive and well, ready to go again.

When school began in September, I asked for volunteers from Immaculate Heart High School to help me on Saturdays. Pat O'Malley, a member of the Immaculate Heart High School Parents Club and a former actor, had a photography shop and offered to come down and take pictures. He fell in love with the children and continued to take pictures of individuals and activities for several years. Three scrapbooks of his work are now in the archives of the Chinese Historical Society of Southern California.

One of the most popular volunteers was Eugenia Puccinelli. She taught dancing and helped put on programs at War Rallies, Ten-Ten celebrations at the Mason Theater Benefit, the Center itself, and even a performance at Immaculate Heart College costumes.

Another gifted dancing teacher, a volunteer from Immaculate Heart High School, was Martha Goldbach. She eventually joined our school faculty and taught tumbling, soft shoe and tap. Her mother donated material and made all of the beautiful costumes.

The drama classes went well. I used Henri Gheon's play, "Journey of the Three Kings", twice. Once with the older children, and again with the younger ones. The big question the players asked was "Is this story true?" When the answer was "yes", the result was that Herod, his secretary, and the three kings were baptized.

After two years of summer school, I suggested to Father that we start a real primary school. He agreed, and he got the approval



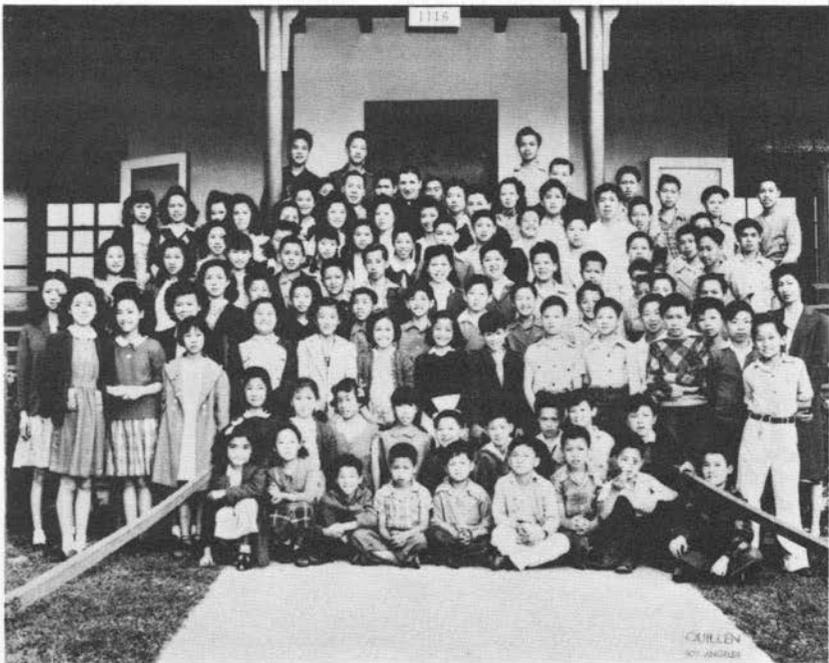
Sisters Noemi and Francella, with their first summer school pupils in 1942. Attending were the Hall's, the Louie's, the Quan's, the Chan's, Mabel Kwong, Lilly Mu, and others. Classes were offered in acting and music.



Dr. Stanley Chan presents prize winning pupils to receive their language award from Archbishop Cantwell. (circa 1943)



Nativity scene from "The Journey of the Three Kings," by Henri Gheon in 1943. L to R: Wilton Woo, Chadwick Woo, Lilly Mu, Hoover Louie, Raymond Louie.



Student Body of the Language School, Spring 1944, with Father Cowhig, Dr. Chan, and Mr. & Mrs. Ching.

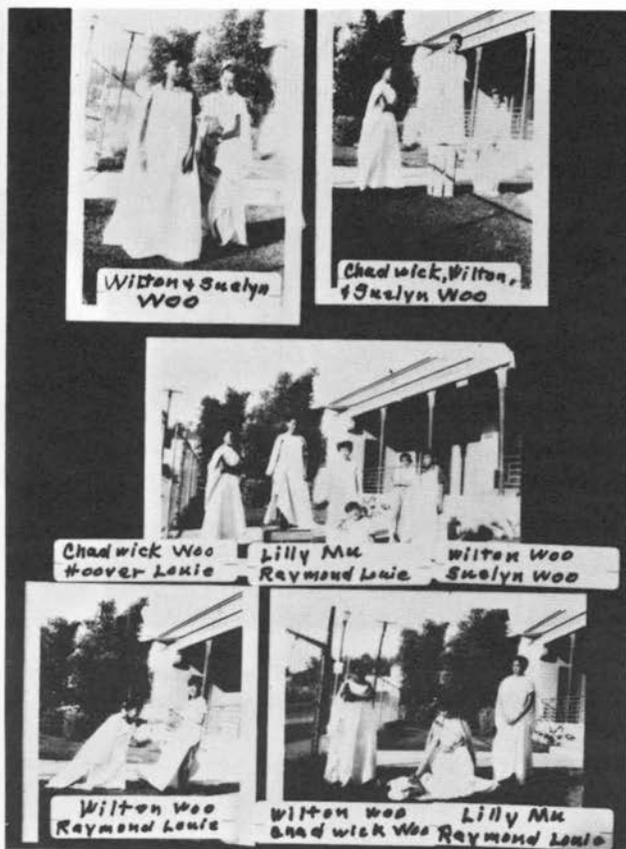


Officers of the Youth Club, 1944.

First row, L to R: Calvin Woo, Owen Kwong, Betty Quon. Second row, L to R: Beatrice Fung, Wallace Quon, Mickey Wong.



Ten-Ten Day, 1944, The combined student bodies of the language and grade school joined other groups on the steps of City Hall, to celebrate the great Chinese holiday.



The cast of "Great Caesar" in 1946.



Tea and sandwiches were served to the parents by the children after the show on Parents' Night in 1946.



Martin Jung's Baptism in 1946, with Eugenia Puccinelli as Godmother and John Sarconi as Godfather. Notice the altar with its distinctive tabernacle in Chinese style.

The Catholic Chinese Academy
 AMERICAN SCHOOL DIVISION
Conducted by Sisters of the Immaculate Heart of Mary
present
 THE TOYS IN SANTA'S WORKSHOP
 A PROGRAM OF CHINESE SONGS
 AND
 A NATIVITY TABLEAU
 AND
 MOTION PICTURES
**美國羅省天主教立
華文學院
慶祝聖誕會**
 ◀表演目錄▶
 聖誕老人的玩物店中
 中國歌
 生表演
 有聲電影

SCHOOL AUDITORIUM
 1114 N. Foothill
 Los Angeles 12, Calif.
 December 11, 1947
 7:15 P.M.

地點 本校禮堂
 新舊南塔路河街
 一千一百一十六號門牌
 日期
 一九四七年十二月十五日
 晚七時半

HONORARIES ACCEPTED FOR A NEW SCHOOL.
 為新學校基金募捐

The printed program of the 1947 Christmas Program.



The grade school children with their first bus in 1947.



Sr. Angelia Ying and Fr. Lyons join Mrs. Emma Fong and Mrs. Lena Fung with their grandchildren at their First Holy Communion.



Fr. Quinn sitting with his young friends, John, Christopher, and Gregory Louie, Easter 1972.



Dancers trained by Sister Grace Yip performing at the Lotus Festival, 1974



The Center's Bazaar, 1975.



Cardinal Manning greeting parishioners after Confirmation in 1977.



Summer Day Camp kids go to the L.A. Zoo in 1988



Fr. Peter at Chinese New Year in 1989.



Sisters from the Immaculate Heart Community join the Center for Chinese New Year activities. 1990.



Sacred Heart Sisters with Joe Ng. Mary Liu, Annette Chui and Ivy Cheng lead the sing-a-long at Chinese New Year, 1990.

of the Archbishop while I asked Mother Eucharist for a full time assignment in Chinatown. Permission was granted. Dr. Chan suggested that we name the school, the Catholic Chinese Academy. I thought the title was a little heavy, but he said that that was a name that would appeal to the Chinese because of what it meant in China.

We prepared for twenty. Two came. Two kindergarteners. A few days later, Mrs. Dorothy Siu called. Would I please take her two boys? They were in the fourth and sixth grades, but they were being harassed at school, and they needed special help in reading. Well, yes. We certainly had plenty of room. By the end of the year we had eleven children. The next year we had twenty-two, the next year forty-four, the next year eighty-eight.

Father Cowhig was very concerned about the prejudice existing against the Chinese in Los Angeles, as well as about the prejudice of the Chinese against the white community. What better way to break down the barriers than by sending the happy, smiling, little ones as ambassadors into the English-speaking community? He became a member of the Co-ordinating Council of the city, met many civic leaders and educators, and joined with them in planning multi-cultural events. He also contacted public school principals and asked for invitations for our children to perform at student assemblies.

On October 10, 1944, the combined student bodies of the language and grade school joined other Chinese organizations on the steps of City Hall to celebrate Ten-Ten day. That same day, the girls of our drama club, the Morning Star Players, under the direction of Eugenia Puccinelli, danced at the assembly of Central Junior High School.

On June 3, 1945, the children participated in a War Bond Rally held in Pershing Square. The head of the War Bond committee wrote to the Archbishop saying that he "had never witnessed anything more delightful than the children's Catholic Church Choir as they presented their various numbers" and they should be commended, too, "for the manner in which they have been taught deportment as well as efficiency in portraying their numbers, both speaking, singing, and dancing."

The next year, on March 25, 1946, the children and the young people entertained at a meeting of the Los Angeles school teachers, held at the Lakewood Country Club. The following program was given:

- Introductory Speech - Chadwick Woo
- Chinese National Anthem and War Songs - Glee Club
- Chinese Art - speech by Wilton Woo
- "In a Chinese Garden" - Dancers
- Chinese Music - speech by Raymond Louie
- Chinese Folk Songs - Betty Mae and Adora Kay Chan,
introduced by Chadwick Woo
- Chinese Education - speech by Martin Jung
- Folk Tale, "Bridge Built for the Convenience of My Mother"
- recited by Suelyn Woo
- Nursery Rhymes and Games - Kindergarteners and First
Graders: Shirley Fong, Wallace Fong, Chester Jung,
Beatrice Yee, Elaine Fong, Linda Hoey, and Lorraine
Leung; announced by Johnny Hom, Raymond Lee,
and Donnie Lee
- Finale: Dances of other Nations - members of the Morning Star
Players

In May of 1947, our grade school children were invited to perform again for the Los Angeles Teachers at the Paducah School. That same month, we participated in a Youth Rally sponsored by the Civic Center Co-ordinating Council. On June 11, Father Cowhig received a thank-you note from the Editor of Public Information of the Los Angeles City Board of Education for allowing the grade school children to participate in a radio program. The Principal of the Carthay Center School in Los Angeles wrote on June 20, "that it was certainly a red letter day when you... brought your group of talented Chinese children to Carthay Center School..." Another Youth Rally was held a year later sponsored by the Co-ordinating Council. It included two of our young adults: Lilly Mu, for Belmont, and Edna Louie, for the Cathayettes. Our grade school children also sang and danced.

One of the most satisfying performances, most alive in the memories of the Morning Star Players, was their appearance at an assembly at Immaculate Heart College. On this occasion, Eugenia was among her peers, and her dancers did her proud while the young actors played "Julius Caesar" with great zest.

One might suppose from the above report that all we taught was show business. Not true. The curriculum was that of the State Board of Education. Religious instruction was given when requested,

but morals were taught to all.

Archbishop Cantwell wrote to a friend of his in New York:

Mr. Mulcahy,

.... One of the joys of arriving home was the happiness of being able to help our flourishing St. Bridget's Mission for the Chinese people in Los Angeles. I am deeply grateful for your check of \$1,000 for this purpose... you will be happy to hear that our Chinese Mission is filled to capacity and overflowing. The Immaculate Heart Sisters are helping the Columban Fathers there, but are unable to cope with the numbers that are coming. They are entertaining plans to have a full-fledged grammar school there... and are already running two busses... God bless you... and reward you for our goodness to us.

This letter was important to the Archbishop's support for a future school. Mr. Mulcahy was the benefactor who paid for the original building, and who, in fact, requested that the Center be called "St. Bridget's Catholic Chinese Center", in honor of his mother. He had also stipulated that it was for the Chinese people, and that Mass would be celebrated there every Sunday. Because the building would also serve as Social Center and a school, the altar was placed in an alcove at the north end and shut behind two doors.

I was transferred to Catholic Girls' High School at the end of the 1948 school year. My sister Norma (Sister Mary Joseph) was sent to take my place. Another grade was added; students needing special help were admitted, and Father Cowhig asked for a four room school building.

Unfortunately, Archbishop Cantwell had died and was replaced by a Cardinal from New York. He was a business man with no knowledge of the situation in Chinatown, and could not see why the children could not attend the Catholic School a few blocks away. He ordered the Center's school closed in 1951 except for the nursery and kindergarten, and ordered the children to be sent to Queen of Angels Grammar School.

Mother Eucharist needed another teacher at that school and refused to let Sister Mary Joseph stay there in Chinatown. Father Cowhig could not get any other Sisters to come. All in all, the school programs had accomplished their original purpose. Good friends and converts had been made, and the doors to the Chinese commu-

nity were now open. A new phase was to begin.

Overview

In its first fifty years, St. Bridget's Catholic Chinese Center has developed from a traditional church mission into a unique mission-church-center in Los Angeles Chinatown. The informal nature of the place, the common mix of non-Catholic and Catholic members (often within families), and the constant presence of new faces are a few indicators of its mission-like characteristics. But primarily, the Center remains missionary in purpose because it is so centrally located and within a community now largely composed of immigrant Chinese who need varied and immediate help.

According to one long-time parishioner, the life of the Catholic Chinese Center has always been tied to the political events of China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Vietnam and even Burma. With each turmoil in the Far East, the Center has served as a first stop to the newly displaced Chinese Catholics entering the Los Angeles area. Since the elimination of the quota system in the mid-1960's, the Center has acted as a way-station for a flood of immigrants - offering whatever assistance possible to the newcomers, and then propelling them into the mainstream of American life. Incidentally, this process will continue as more Catholics leave mainland China and will become more important when the government of Hong Kong changes.

The Center today is not yet a conventional Catholic church due to its physical and staff limitations. There also prevails an Archdiocesan policy which discourages ethnic churches while actively seeking out these diverse groups. Nevertheless, the Center leaders have continually tried to find a good solution.

After Father Cowhig retired in 1954, another Columban priest, Father Anthony O'Doherty from the Kiangsi mission in China, was assigned to be pastor. Now two dedicated community parishioners, Mrs. Lena Fung and Emma Fong, were waiting to assist Father in family visits and in every other Center matter.

Soon two Chinese Sisters of Social Service joined the missionary team. Sisters Angelia Ying and Pauline Jen conducted Saturday religion classes and organized a Ladies Altar Society for older women as well as a youth club called the Futurians. Attendance at the Center grew.

Father O' Doherty requested Archdiocesan funds for a new church building but was given a greatly expanded kitchen in order

to have what was to become an annual fundraising bazaar. The event was modeled after what the early Center group had seen given by the Immaculate Heart Sisters, with Mrs. Fung, Sister Angelia and other help soliciting food and prizes from the Chinatown merchants.

The next expansion effort came under Father Matthew Quinn, our third and last Columban priest. His ambition at ordination was to spend his life working in China - until the 1949 social revolution changed his course. For almost two decades and without speaking the predominant dialect, this perfectly empathetic Irish pastor was able to regularly enter both immigrant and acculturated homes, to assess their particular needs and to simply meet them. Father was quickly joined by a Columban Sister, Teresita Yu, who directed Catechism and Chinese classes for seven summers. The Center soon became a special place for making and helping Chinese friends as well as for practicing the Catholic faith.

Once again, attendance at the Center grew in the mid-1960's. And still more were to come with the new immigration laws that brought a wave of overseas Chinese with their entire families to Los Angeles. At the same time, new church policy encouraged the relocation of the altar to allow the priest to centrally face his congregation. To meet these needs and to provide adequate space for Mass to be offered simultaneously in English and Chinese for the many newcomers, Father Quinn again asked for a church solution. He had already attempted to partially share St. Peter's facilities, but the Italian priests could not make any formal commitments. The answer was not to be a new church but rather a second expansion.

The expanded building as it stands today was voluntarily designed by an early Center convert, Martin Jung, and was engineered by another parishioner, Kingman Huang, with support from the Archdiocese. The new Center was enlarged, modernized and had a special ramp to facilitate funeral services.

In 1973, the Society Devoted to the Sacred Heart brought to the Center a team of Anglo and Chinese Sisters to introduce a wide array of both cultural and church activities. Sister Lucia Tu brought her guitar and new songs which she taught the young people to play and sing during Mass. Sister Grace Yip taught traditional dance and folk songs which were performed on Chinese holidays and for the public. They also offered mountain camp retreats for children and parents. Parishioners later organized a summer day camp with

field trips around Los Angeles. Religion classes were made available to all in English and Chinese, until now a group of dedicated lay teachers have been trained to work with the Sisters. In the process of this good work, the Center produced its first vocation in Annette Chui, a Hong Kong immigrant who found her way to St. Bridget's, was converted there and then joined the Sacred Heart Sisters community.

The newcomers from all over Asia arrived at the Center bringing many other Chinese dialects along with Cantonese. The time had come for an indigenous priest. In 1980, the Columban fathers withdrew to be replaced by Father Peter Tsang, a priest from Hong Kong who was born in Shanghai. Speaking Cantonese, Mandarin, Shanghainese as well as English, Father Peter soon offered two Masses: one in Cantonese and another in English with Cantonese translation.

To summarize, the role of the Catholic Chinese Center in Chinatown is best exemplified by the many people it has welcomed and does try to serve. The Center began with a small number of American born Chinese children, some of whom became converts. A few of their parents joined the Church while most remained very supportive to the Center. Added were some adult Catholics who converted their families and relatives. Eventually, the original children grew up, moved away, but brought their children back for baptism, religious training and mutual friendship. When old enough, these children sought their former priest to perform their marriages, in their suburban churches, of course. Meanwhile, a few acculturated young Catholic families were attracted to St. Bridget's in Chinatown and now came regularly to reinforce their Catholic faith along with their Chinese heritage. Added to the community were a significant number of senior citizens who lived nearby and considered the Center to be their spiritual home.

Interspersed and growing rapidly are the overseas Catholics along with non-Catholics who were taught in the highly respected schools in Asia. Joining them are the many Catholic refugees from China. And now a part of this community are Chinese priests, Brothers, and Sisters trained overseas but are here for further studies and new opportunities.

Along with all these acculturation and religious functions, the Center has served the Catholic Church at large as well as the Chinatown community. The Center has received all visiting Catholic dignitaries wishing to address the Chinese Catholic community,

often to seek funds and support for their missions in Asia or for Chinese Catholic study in America. Both past and present archbishops of Los Angeles have celebrated Mass at the Center to demonstrate their interest and concern. When the Pope visited in Los Angeles in 1987, several parishioners were invited to actively participate. He toured Chinatown and the Chinese Center was assigned a main block on Broadway along with the largest parishes in Southern California.

As often as Father Peter is asked to offer invocation at civic occasions in Chinatown and as often as St. Bridget's parishioners support local fundraisers and Chinese Historical Society functions, it is now safe to say that the Chinese Catholic Center is definitely recognized as a permanent part of an active Los Angeles Chinatown community.

In closing, we offer a special invitation to all early participants of the Center, especially non-Catholics, to join us at our Golden Jubilee mass followed by dinner at the Golden Palace on Saturday, October 27, 1990. We also welcome any photos and historical information which could enrich our Anniversary scrapbook. Please contact: Noemi Crews (213-382-9351) or Timothy Chan (213-662-3788).



St. Bridget's Catholic Chinese Center in 1986.

REFERENCES

Photographs and Records from 3 Scrapbooks donated to the Chinese Historical Society of Southern California.

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Archives of the Columban Fathers, St. Columbans, Nebraska.

Records of the Immaculate Heart Community, Hollywood, California.

Records of St. Bridget's Catholic Chinese Center.

Oral recollections of Mary Noemi Crews, Immaculate Heart Community.

Interviews with: Jennie Lee, True Light Presbyterian Church
Marian Lee Leng, First Chinese Baptist Church
Gilbert Leong, Architect and Old Chinatown resident
Hoover Louie, Catholic Chinese Center convert
Sister Angelia Ying, Sisters of Social Service

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MOON FESTIVAL MEMORIES

by Margie Lew

Chinese Historical Society of Southern California



August 7, 1941 - a time to remember for residents of Los Angeles and surrounding communities. That was the beginning of a three-day celebration of the Moon Festival in Los Angeles Chinatown. According to accounts written in newspapers and magazines, this was an event of great sparkle and splendor, surpassed only by the brilliance of the moon itself on those three nights.

The Festival was two-fold: the traditional celebration to worship the Moon Goddess; and a fund-raiser for United China Relief (an agency dedicated to sending food, money and medical supplies to thousands of refugees in China suffering from the Japanese invasion). Many prominent citizens, led by then-Mayor Fletcher Bowron, were sponsors of this humanitarian effort.

The festivities began at 7 P.M. on Thursday, August 7, when Mayor Bowron unlocked the gates of Old Chinatown, signalling the entrance of the Moon Festival Parade. Thousands of spectators lined the streets to witness this spectacular two-hour event. And what a parade it was!! -- Marching Bands, Dignitaries, Magnificent Horses, Camel Riders, Chinese Lanterns, Drum Majorettes, and a 200 foot long Dragon (making its first appearance since 1906). One of the highlights of the parade was a group of 100 Hollywood movie stars -- such names as Humphrey Bogart, Jane Wyman, Red Skelton, Mickey Rooney, Judy Garland, Claudette Colbert, Marlene Dietrich, Don Ameche, Cesar Romero, Bob Hope, Laurel and Hardy. Also Robert Preston, Olivia de Haviland, Betty Grable, John Wayne, Susan Hayward, Anne Baxter, Jackie Cooper, Gene Tierney, and Ronald Reagan. The parade ended with a beautifully-decorated float with lovely Margaret Kwong as Moon Goddess.



Lilly Yee (Chan) crowning the 1941 Moon Goddess - Margaret Kwong, assisted by Mary Yee (Tom).

In addition to the parade, there were all types of entertainment presented in Old Chinatown, China City and New Chinatown -- acrobats, magicians, lantern procession, Chinese music and drama, shadow-boxing, fashion shows, Chinese dances, piano and accordion solos, hula dancing, and of course,

concessions. Anna May Wong, Keye Luke, and Victor Sen Yung -- famous screen personalities -- were masters of ceremonies for the stage presentations. The Hollywood stars made personal appearances in the three Chinatowns, signed autographs, and were photographed with Moon Goddess Margaret Kwong and Festival participants.



Admission to all festivities of this spectacular three-day event, including a parade each evening, was the paltry sum of -- fifty cents!! Impossible, you say? Maybe so -- but remember, this was 49 years ago, and things have changed!

In observance of the Moon Festival and United China Relief Week, a very special exhibit was shown, according to local news accounts:

"The Princess Der Ling collection of treasures from the household of Her Majesty Tzu Hsi, last ruler of the Manchu Dynasty, will be displayed in a window at Barker Bros. in downtown Los Angeles.

A highlight of the display will be a carved teakwood bed used by the Princess Der Ling while she resided in the Imperial Palace in Peking when she was first lady-in-waiting to the Empress Dowager. The exhibit will include the imperial bedspread, made expressly for the Dowager by two sewing women during a five-year period. Also to be shown are a teakwood altar table with two fragile jade trees made of green and white

jade, coral, lapis lazuli and amethyst. Between the trees is a royal scepter of ebony, inlaid with silver thread and bearing three pieces of white jade.

Other scepters include a pair made of gold filigree work inlaid with pearls and jade, and a lacquer scepter given to the Princess by the Emperor, Kwang Hsu. Also on display are some intimate possessions of the imperial family, such as a jade roller which the Empress used for massaging her face, and a pair of interlocking white jade rings which she used to keep her fingers and hands supple."



The highly-successful Festival was enjoyed by thousands of citizens. The entire proceeds from the event was added to the United China Relief Fund. Festivals may come, and festivals may go -- but there are those who will say that many a moon will rise and set before the recurrence of a celebration as exciting, as impressive, as spectacular as the Moon Festival of August 1941.

CHINESE MOON FESTIVAL SUCCESS

By Munson Kwok

Chinese Historical Society of Southern California



Photo by: Tom Eng

From the comments of Festival goers and press observers, Chinese Moon Festival 1990 was a great artistic and public success. Crowd estimates ranged from 2,500 (Asian Week) to 5,000 (Chinese Daily News) on a beautifully sunny Sunday of the three day Labor Day weekend. The numbers were well above the anticipations of Festival planners for a first-time neighborhood ethnic event. Reaping the benefits of coincidence, this was also the weekend of a full moon, so necessary for the unexpectedly popular nocturnal Moon Viewing event, and also the opening of the citywide Los Angeles Festival, of which the Chinese Moon Festival 1990 was an integral part.

Chinese Moon Festival 1990 was funded in major part by the City of Los Angeles Cultural Affairs Department, which also provided technical support and festival management. As part of the city's Cultural Affairs Department requirements, Chinese Moon Festival 1990 was characteristically authentic in the free performing arts, arts, and crafts offered visitors. Presentations adhered to the Chinese heritage and culture regarding the customs and activities of the season. Thus there was an unusual emphasis on the calligraphic arts, literature, poetry, and story telling. Notably (and thankfully) absent were the commercial sponsorships sometimes commonly visible at today's fairs and festivals. An undoubted highlight of the Festival was the dramatic telling of the Moon Festival myths by noted author and playwright Frank Chin, with a booming



Frank Chin, noted author and playwright.

voice transmitted throughout the Yale Street venues and artisans booths by a Cultural Affairs P.A. system.

Other cultural highlights must include the magnificent Kwun Opera, a feast for sight and sound. The Kwun Opera was to go on to rave reviews as an individual part of the Los Angeles Festival the next weekend, with many of the same musicians and performers who graced the much more modest Alpine Center stage. The East-Wind Martial Arts group presented the immensely popular, highly exciting and disciplined show, for which they are well-known. Three groups of musicians and scholars played using traditional Chinese instruments. They exhibited a high quality of live performance, playing many of the well-known

Chinese classical pieces as well as some "moon" tunes. Three groups of children's folk dancers also performed well (Castelar, Orange County, Meth-



Preparing for the Opera performance.



A scene from a Chinese Opera.

Photo by: Jim Lew

ASIAN FOCUS - Nov./Dec. 1990

odist Church). They were an audience delight and provided many photo opportunities.

A highly publicized feature of the Festival was the colorful appearance of the strange Bread and Puppets theater and parade, which stepped off on Yale Street in midafternoon, just after Frank Chin's drama. This raucous, entertaining interlude was certainly a fine example of cross-cultural exchange offered



Chinese Musical Entertainers.

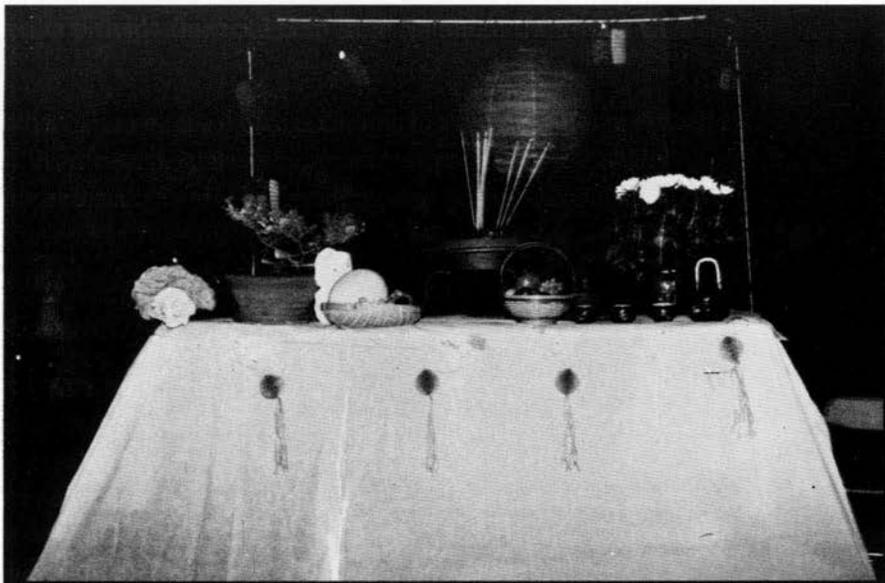
Photo by: Tom Eng



Castelar School students performing a Chinese Ribbon Dance

by the Los Angeles Festival. It established that Chinatown is now very much a part of the diverse cultural network which is part of Southern California.

Perhaps the most unique event of the Festival was the night-time Moon Viewing event. The free Moon Viewing event featured the re-creation of a traditional ceremony not publicly seen in Los Angeles Chinatown for 40, perhaps nearly 50 years. With narration, this tradition was demonstrated to the audience of over 700 in the Castelar schoolyard by Miss Chinatown 1990 Christina Gong and her Court while the (nearly) full moon beamed down from overhead. An actual astronomical telescope was situated nearby, courtesy of Griffith Observatory, for free looks at the moon.



Moon Festival Ceremony

*Photo by: Jim Lew
ASIAN FOCUS - Nov./Dec. 1990*

Earlier, Ms. Gong and her young friends had presented a ceremonial dress display at the fine Moon Festival Banquet at Miriwa restaurant. Then the dinner goers conducted a casual, but traditional lantern parade along Hill Street to the playground.

Foodwise, the hottest seller was mooncakes. Undoubtedly, these became a big attraction after the two curiously popular "Ken and Lel" outdoor shows, which demonstrated the making of the delicacies. "Ken" is Kenneth Chan, President of the Chinese Chamber of Commerce, and "Lel" is Leland Chan, of Phoenix Bakery, purveyors of mooncakes, which were specially ordered by the Festival ahead of season.



Chamber President Ken and cousin Leland demonstrate the art of making Moon Cakes.
Photo by: Jim Lew

Chinatown Moon Festival 1990 "put Los Angeles Chinatown on the map for a day." Mayor Tom Bradley declared September 2 to be "Chinese Moon Festival Day." Highly publicized, the result of a three month very effective and efficient Festival public relations committee, the Moon Festival accessed most news-printed media, Chinese and English, in Southern California. Especially noteworthy were featured articles in Los Angeles Times by Grace Siao and by Barbara Hansen, the food editor. Also unique were follow-up news articles after the event, which do not often occur. There were street banners, pink in color, mailers, and flyers galore. Linkage with the Los Angeles Festival enabled Moon Festival to ride the curl of the publicity wave, controversial or positive, of the Los Angeles Festival itself.

As a result, Chinese Moon Festival 1990 drew a diversified audience



*Ceramicist at work. Photo by: Jim Lew
ASIAN FOCUS - Nov./Dec. 1990*

In the end, Chinatown Moon Festival achieved to a great degree what planners and the Cultural Affairs Department had hoped. It was an event which was part entertainment, part education, and all outreach to all visitor segments. Dr. Willie Collins of the Cultural Affairs Department's Folk Arts Division gave the Festival high marks all round for achieving most of its goals.

There remain one-of-a kind mementos of the Chinese Moon Festival 1990 for sale. (Available at the next Society meeting: Tee shirts \$10, booklets, \$2).

The Chinese Historical Society has been proud to be a joint sponsor for Chinese Moon Festival 1990 with its partners, the Chinese Cultural and Community Center of Greater Los Angeles and the Cultural Affairs Department. This was a major effort for the summer. The Society provided Festival planners, managers, financial management, money, public relations, festival expertise, and, above all, volunteers. A special tribute must be made to Sue Yee, who co-chaired the Festival Committee for the Society, and to co-chair Barbara Jean Lee, who represented the Cultural and Community Center. Thanks to all who participated.



Tyrus Wong demonstrates kite-making.

HISTORY OF THE LOS ANGELES CHINESE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

-Excerpts from an original article written by Dr. J. Wesley Hole as appeared in the 100th Anniversary book of the Chinese United Methodist Church-



*Senior Pastor
Reverend Leo L. Hsu*



*Associate Pastor
Reverend Mamie Ko*



*Associate Pastor
Reverend Chin-Cheak Yu*

One hundred years ago Los Angeles was little more than a sleepy hamlet. It was a city to be, but was not yet born. The time was before automobiles, telephones, radios or motion pictures. Small communities of various ethnic groups were appearing for unknown reasons. In each of these ethnic communities a church became the center for social, cultural and educational activities.

The number of Chinese residents was indeed small but the need for fellowship was real. A Mrs. A.A. Birdsall, a former missionary, got the available Chinese Christians together in a fellowship that found a meeting

place at 204 Marchessault Street. This was the year 1887. A retired missionary from China, Dr. Otis Gibson, appeared and worked tirelessly establishing a chain of Chinese missions in California-Sacramento, San Jose, San Francisco, Oakland and Los Angeles. Spurred by the impetus of the movement, Mrs. Birdsall and a Mr. Spencer organized the fellowship into a mission in 1890. This group became an integral part of the California Oriental Mission of the Methodist Episcopal Church. However, it was not until 1893 that the first Chinese minister, Reverend Chan Lok Shang, was appointed. The Mission took on new life and moved to more adequate quarters at 510¹/₂ North Los Angeles Street.

Rev. Chan's tenure was short and in 1894 the Rev. Chan Hon Fun was appointed. His pastorate covered six years. Under his leadership the Mission flourished and another move was necessary. The new address at 522¹/₂ North Los Angeles Street was to be the home of the Mission for the next fifty years. The location was across the street east from the Plaza Park.

When Rev. Chan Hon Fun was transferred to another pastorate in 1900 he was succeeded by a local pastor, the Rev. Chan Kiu Sing, who had been a member of the fellowship from its inception. He was a man of proven ability and leadership. His tenure was to last for 23 years. His life came to a tragic end in an automobile accident on Christmas Eve of 1923. His pastorate had shown a steady growth. During this period faithful workers such as Mrs. Helen Birdsall, Mrs. Florence Freeman, Mrs. L.B. Ward and Miss Emma Bohannon gave consecrated service to the work of the Mission .

After the death of Rev. Chan Kiu Sing, the Mission was without a pastor for a period of time. In 1925 the Rev. Chan Sing Kai, a newly retired minister from San Jose, was appointed to the charge. Although he was retired he served the church well for several years. Then he was asked to go to San Francisco. The Los Angeles Church was again without a pastor. The Mission went into a period of decline and would have been closed had it not been for faithful volun-teers such as Miss Emma Bohannon, Mrs. Leong Jeong, Miss Hockett and Mr. Jesse Porter.

In 1938 Dr. Ernest S. Lyons, a retired missionary from the Philippines and a resident of Los Angeles, was appointed to the Superintendency of the California Oriental Mission. Since the Los Angeles Church had no pastor, Dr. Lyons assumed that responsibility temporarily.

During the early 1940's three unrelated changes occurred in various church affairs that would eventually have a definite effect upon the destinies of the Los Angeles Chinese Church.

1. Bishop James C. Baker, whose Episcopal Area included the California Oriental Mission, and whose offices had been in San Francisco, moved to the Los Angeles Chinese Church.

2. Dr. W. Vernon Middleton became the Executive Secretary of the Church Extension Department of the Division of National Mission of the Board of Missions in Philadelphia.

3. Rev. Wun Bew Wong, recently from China was persuaded by Dr. Lyons to become his assistant in 1941, and was appointed full time Minister of the Chinese Church in 1943.

With the arrival of Rev. Wong and his family, the Chinese Church really came to life. The rented upstairs quarters where the church had been located for the past fifty years, were inadequate. The church moved to a street level store building at 618 New High Street. This location was more accessible but what the church really needed above all else was a new home the Chinese Church could call its own.

The dream for a new church was shared with Dr. Lyons. He in turn discussed the problem with Bishop Baker. Fortunately, a visit on the West Coast by Dr. Middleton was more than just a timely coincidence. A meeting with Dr. Middleton by Dr. Lyons, Bishop Baker and Dr. J. Wesley Hole, Treasurer of Southern California-Arizona Conference, was arranged. Dr. Hole had worked with Dr. Middleton on several Church Building projects. Dr. Middleton agreed to provide financial assistance by both a sizeable donation and a loan with certain requirements for the Church to meet. Bishop Baker and Dr. Hole agreed to provide financial help from Southern California Conference.

An effort had begun in the Chinese Church to raise the amount it would have to provide in order to meet the requirements stipulated by Dr. Middleton. The fund raising project was given a great impetus with the acquisition of a very desirable lot at 825 North Hill Street.

By April 1947 sufficient funds had been raised to permit the Church to have a groundbreaking ceremony and for construction to begin.

Another fortunate circumstance mitigate to the benefit of the church. Mr. George Steed of Alhambra, whose father had been a minister in the Southern California Conference, was one of the brothers who operated Steed Brothers Construction Company. They had built many churches in Southern California where both Dr. Middleton and Dr. Hole were involved. Because of his great interest in building churches, Mr. Steed agreed to contract to build the Chinese Church on terms that would meet the requirements of the lender for a

guaranteed “top-price amount”. However in billing the work he would do the job on a “time and material” basis and at the end of construction he would return to the Church whatever amount had not been used. This procedure amounted to a donation of several hundred dollars. Dr. Hole agreed to establish an escrow account in his office for the project and serve as the Coordinator. The total cost of the building and furnishings was estimated to be \$75,000. All the funds to cover the cost of the contract were deposited in the escrow account before construction could begin. The National Board of Missions donated \$17,000 and loaned \$15,000. Church friends in Southern California Conference provided \$13,250. The Chinese Church heroically raised \$25,000. About \$8,000 of the amount from the Chinese Church had been paid out by Mr. H.G. Jung, Church Treasurer, for miscellaneous items that did not go through the escrow account.



The plan worked like a charm and on Nov. 16, 1947 the first service in the new building was held. Bishop Baker was present to consecrate the building. The dreams and hard work of the Rev. Wun Bew Wong and his faithful congregation had come to a perfect fruition. The sanctuary was even more beautiful and inspiring than had been the modest plans at the beginning of the project. Rev. Wong and the congregation set about immediately to pay off the loan from the National Division. With the help from several churches in Southern California Conference the \$15,000 loan was repaid in full in four years.

In 1952 the California Oriental Mission was merged with the Caucasian Conferences on the West Coast and the Los Angeles Chinese Church became a part of the Southern California Conference. Bishop Baker retired and was replaced by Bishop Gerald H. Kennedy who became a staunch friend and supporter of the church.

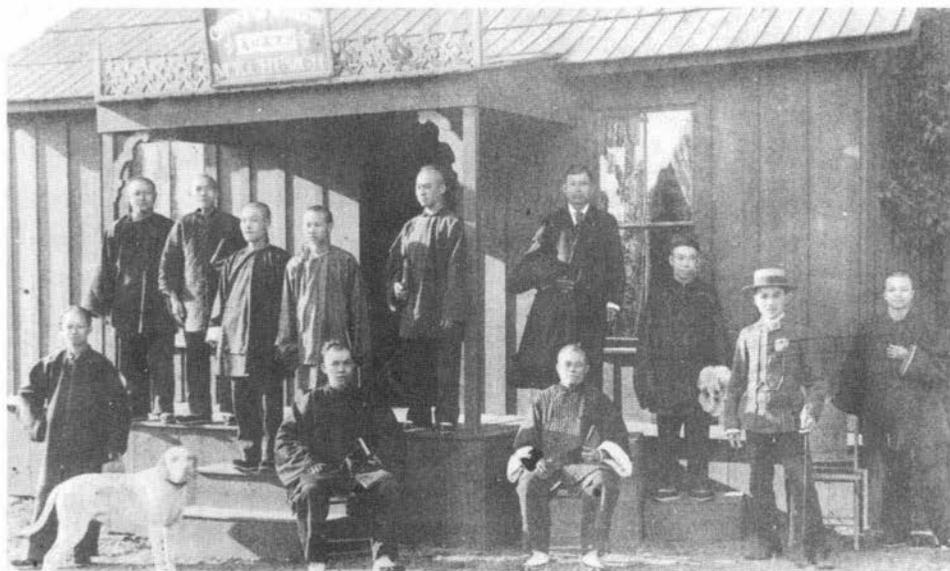
The leadership and influence of Rev. Wong in the community were recognized, and in 1954 he was awarded the degree of Doctor of Divinity by California Western University of San Diego. This was an honor highly deserved. His lovely wife, Elizabeth, should have been awarded the degree of Ph.T. (Putting Hubby Through). No one in the church worked more diligently than Elizabeth did. From the very start of Wong's pastorate in 1941 she was tireless in her efforts at any point. Her help was needed whether it be as secretary, teacher, choir member or president of Women's Society Christian Service.

Even with the great improvement of the new building compared with the rented quarters the church had used for so many years, it lacked adequate rooms for the growing educational program. As soon as the church loan was paid off, efforts to accumulate sufficient funds for additional rooms that were needed began. By 1968 it was possible to arrange for construction of quarters over the social hall and dining room at the back of the sanctuary. The new improvements were completed in early 1969 at a cost about \$30,000 and was debt free.

Doctor Wong had served the church for 27 years and had reached retirement age. At the Annual Conference session in June 1968 he was granted the retired relationship. Rev. Joseph Ma was appointed as pastor of the church and served for eleven years. At the Conference session of 1979 Rev. Leo L. Hsu was appointed to succeed Rev. Ma.

One hundred years of life - whether it be a tree, or a human being or an institution deserves recognition and celebration. Dr. Hal Luccock wrote a book many years ago about the high and daring hours of Methodism. He called it "Endless line of Splendor". In the preface he said "It is a moving story that reaches a climax but does not end". Certainly the history of the Los Angeles Chinese Methodist Church is a part of the "Endless line of Splendor". At one hundred years of age it has reached a climax but it does not end. It now begins another hundred years of service to God and to the Chinese Community of Los Angeles.

HIGHLIGHTS IN THE CHINESE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH



- 1887 Formation of the Chinese Christian Fellowship (CCF) at 204 Marchesault Street.
- 1893 The CCF became part of the Pacific Chinese Mission of the Methodist Church. Rev. Lok-Shang Chan was appointed Pastor. The mission moved to 510 $\frac{1}{2}$ North Los Angeles Street.
- 1894 Rev. Hon was appointed minister. Progress was made and the mission moved to 522 $\frac{1}{2}$ No. Los Angeles Street.
- 1900 Rev. Hon-Fun Chan was transferred to San Francisco and succeeded by Rev. Kiu-Sing Chan.
- 1923 Rev. Kiu-Sing Chan's dedicated service terminated on Christmas Eve-1923, in an automobile accident.
- 1925 Rev. Sing-Kai Chan became pastor. A Chinese language class was set up with Mrs. Leong Jung in charge.
- 1929 Rev. Sing-Kai Chan resigned and decline ensued. Fortunately, with the help of many faithful Christians, the church held itself together.
- 1938 Dr. Ernest S. Lynos was appointed Superintendent of the California Oriental Mission and served as pastor with the assistance of Mr. Wun Bew Wong.

- 1942 Mr. Wun Bew Wong was appointed as full pastor. Church moved to 6518 New High Street and an English class was set up.
- 1943 A church building committee was formed with Rev. W. B. Wong as Chairman.
- 1944 With sufficient funds, the lot located at 825 North Castelar Street was acquired. (Now known as North Hill Street.)
- 1945 A financial campaign was launched and \$63,600 was raised.
- 1946 A \$15,000 loan was arranged with the Methodist Church for the church building program .
- 1947 Construction began in spring, 1947. By October, the new church building was completed at a cost of \$78,000. On November 16, the church was officially opened for service by Bishop J. Baker.



- 1950 The \$15,000 loan was repaid and the church was dedicated to God.
- 1952 The Oriental Provisional Conference was dissolved. The church became a member of the Southern California-Arizona Conference.
- 1954 A Doctor of Divinity degree was conferred upon Rev. W. B. Wong by the California Western University.
- 1961 70th Anniversary was celebrated on November 20.
- 1965 Sunday School building campaign was launched and \$26,000 was donated.
- 1968 With a loan of \$13,700 from the Methodist Church, construction for a Sunday School addition began in April and was completed in August at a cost of \$35,000. Rev. Dr. W. B. Wong retired. A banquet in his

- honor was celebrated in June
- 1969 Rev. Joseph Ma was appointed pastor.
- 1970 80th Anniversary Banquet was celebrated in conjunction with the annual Thanksgiving Dinner.
- 1971 Chinatown Service Center began its services to the community in December.
- 1972 Danny Yu became the first youth director of the local church.
- 1975 The local church became self-supporting.
- 1976 Committee was formed to start mission project in Orange County.
- 1977 Rev. Leo L. Hsu was appointed to be the first Associate Pastor in January. In June, the first evening service for Orange County mission began. Rev. Joseph Ma retired in November. A banquet in his honor was given in the same month.
- 1978 In July, Rev. Leo Hsu was appointed as pastor of the Orange County Mission, formally chartered in September. In October, Rev. Hsu was reappointed as pastor of the Chinese United Methodist Church of Los Angeles.
- 1979 First Family Camp was held at Westmont College. Mission task force was organized for South Bay area.
- 1980 Ordination of Mamie Ko as Deacon. Second Family Camp was held in Arrowhead Springs. 90th Anniversary was celebrated in November.
- 1981 Pulpit Exchange among the UMC Chinese Pastors was initiated.
- 1982 First Bazaar was organized. First edition of "Simple to Gourmet" was published by UMW. Stewardship Month was scheduled in November annually.
- 1983 The first English Worship was conducted on September 18. Rev. Eryn Adams was appointed as first Minister for Special Ministry, working with the English speaking congregation.
- 1984 Rev. Adams went back to Hawaii to teach in the University. A drama entitled "Dreamer" was presented by the Youth. Mrs. Margaret Cheng undertook to write the Chinese Worship Bulletin. Rev. Miyeko Uriu was appointed as the Associate Pastor in charge of the English Speaking Ministry & Christian Education Department in July. Monthly Newsletters began to be distributed on the first Sunday of each month. "An Evening of Chinese Music" was presented.
- 1985 Second edition of "Simple to Gourmet" was published by UMW. New P.A. system was installed in memory of Mrs. Keh-Ming Liu by her family.
- 1986 Successful implementation of the Stewardship Campaign planned by the Finance & Field Service of the National Division of the General

Board of Global Ministries. Chinese language was used solely in the 11:00 AM Worship Service.

- 1987 Fund-raising lunches were organized by the UMW on the first Sunday of each month. Mr. Alfred Chu and Mr. Keh-Ming Liu were appointed as Choir Directors for the English and Chinese Worship Services respectively. Cheese & honey were distributed to the elderly brothers & sisters.
- 1988 Rev. Leo L. Hsu, Senior Pastor, was elected as the Official Clergy Delegate to represent our Annual Conference to the 1988 General Conference. Rev. Miyeko Uriu was appointed as Co-Pastor & Rev. Leo L. Hsu, as Administrative Pastor. Miss Chin-Cheak Yu became Youth Director. The Junior High Youth Group was formed.
- 1989 The Chinese speaking Youth Group was organized. Rev. Miyeko Uriu retired during the Annual Conference.
- 1990 Rev. Mamie Ko was appointed as Associate Pastor on January 1, in charge of the English Speaking Ministry. Miss Chin-Cheak Yu was ordained on June 17 and appointed as Associate Pastor in charge of the Youth Ministry and Christian Education in July. Kick-off Ceremony of the Centennial Anniversary Celebrations on May 6. Centennial Celebration Thanksgiving Worship Service and Banquet on November 17.

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