



A Publication of the San Lorenzo Japanese Christian Church

"Growing together and reaching out in the love of Christ"

Firmly Rooted

Our Values

Serve Adore Nurture Learn Outreach

"Just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in Him, rooted and built up in Him." Col. 2:6a

Vol. 30, no. 10

October 2020

"Light in Darkness"

Like many, Fall is my favorite time of year. In normal conditions, summer heat blends into cooler and fresher air as the leaves change colors and the days get shorter.

For 2020, the fall season began Sept 22nd and will end Dec 21st. It marks the close of the year and for those in agriculture the beginning of harvest. Typically Fall is a great season, but not this year. I empathize with anyone who can't wait for 2020 to end and look forward to 2021 because of the many challenges we faced and continue to endure. COVID 19, a divided country, tornados, typhoons, fires, and choking air add more stress and anxiety to lives already pushed to the brink. Even as I write, the skies are filled with smoke creating a strange orange hue of darkness. A person in the news commented, *"If someone told me I was in hell, I would believe it."*

Our present circumstance can be described as one of darkness that has overcome the land. Attorney and sought after TED Talk speaker, Valarie Kaur, brings a profound perspective to darkness. She asks, *"What if this is not the darkness of the tomb, but the darkness of the womb?"* I am uncertain of Kaur's faith but there is some truth to her statement. In the darkness of the tomb, life ends. But in the darkness of the womb, life begins.

From John 1: 4-5, the apostle says this about Jesus, *"In Him was life, and life was the light of men. The light shines in darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it."*

Then in John 3:3, Jesus says, *"Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the Kingdom of*

God." Regardless of our current situation, there is hope knowing that even in darkness when we are born again, Jesus is the light that will not be overcome.

A few weeks ago, my wife, Kathy, announced that she will be retiring from her job at the church as our Communications Administrator. It also marked both an end and a beginning. At the close of Jan. 2021, she leaves over 30 fulfilling years of ministry. A legacy built on the prayers, hopes, and faithfulness of God's people. In the same month Jessica, our daughter, will transition into Kathy's role at SanLo. She will help usher in a new chapter of growing God's Kingdom through our church. It's encouraging to observe how God continues to move His church forward despite the trials and tribulations of this year.

Though it may feel like the world is being swallowed up by the calamity that surrounds us, God will not let His people be overtaken. This truth that darkness will not defeat the light, because of the strength and power of Jesus, is the same truth for all who live by faith in Him.

God says to us, *"Do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand... But those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint."*

Isaiah 41:10,31

*In Christ Alone --
Pastor Brian*

Becoming Transformed

By: Shinja Yoo

It took over six years to decide to become a member of SanLo. Membership sounded strange, and almost scary, like signing up for some kind of shady club, or a gang or cult! But the main reason I was hesitant was my arrogant-minded, unworthy self-image, and distrust in general of churches. It prevented me from becoming “one of them – a member.” So, what changed?

I started to attend SanLo when my life was painful enough to disable me from having small conversations with strangers in the church. However, I still needed to go to church to “feed my heart” with God’s words. It was not easy to hide my tears at the hardest time of my life since I was going through a divorce. My divorce was harder than going through cancer because, with cancer, I wanted to live, but with divorce, I wanted to die.

However, even during that dark time, I knew that God was with me. God used SanLo to talk to me and love me. Cynically, I resisted receiving His love and avoided trusting the “church love” for a while because I didn’t trust church people, and also, I thought I didn’t deserve it. In my former Christian network, awkward conversations, sympathetic gestures, and lectures from the Bible, told me that I was “a bad Christian” and I made people feel uncomfortable. I tried thinking that they meant well, and I was thankful for their kindness, but I felt judged and embarrassed. The shift in my identity was hard to adjust to. In my reality, church people were judgmental, and unforgiving, even though we learned about Jesus who loves us unconditionally and forgives us. So, I prejudged SanLo because I was bitter.

Despite my unworthy self-image and negative feelings, SanLo was consistently kind. I saw how the church loved my children, and my thankfulness grew over time. One day, I went to Pastor Scott to thank him and told him the story in my children’s lives. Surprisingly, even though the church knew that I was divorced, they sent my children and me to the NAOMI House mission trip, and invited me to Women in Prayer. Finally, I had no excuse but to admit that their act wasn’t from pity or duty but was from obedience and humble love from God.

Not that I wanted to test SanLo, I recently re-married with a non-Christian man. As much

Shinja with her youngest daughter, Allison.

Praise God that Shinja became a member of SanLo on Sun., Sept. 20!



as the church loved my children, the church was worried. Again, I did something “a bad Christian” would do. However, it didn’t take too long for me to feel accepted, even with my decision. Instead, I felt supported with love and prayers. The best wedding gift we received was marriage counseling from Pastor Brian and Kathy. God didn’t stop there, but He allowed me to study “Christian Counseling” taught by Pastor Brian. The class didn’t just teach me how to serve God by listening to people but also taught me to accept myself as Jesus did, who’s blood had washed away my sin and loved me no matter what. My healing progressed.

The feelings of being an outsider and embarrassment lessened as I found a safe place to ask for prayers in Women in Prayer at church. I felt the synchronizing of our spirits as one when we prayed together. The sense of oneness became stronger as we prayed for Pastor Rod and Koko last year. We worshiped, cried, and prayed together. When Pastor Rod passed away, I was at peace, as some of the prayer partners said, we thank God for preparing our hearts.

After many ups and downs, I found my identity shifted again. My identity is no longer a divorced woman from a broken family, but I relearned to be a daughter of God, who belongs to heaven more than earth. I assume there will be more ups and downs coming, but I know that God prepared me to become a member. Still feeling shy, but ok, I jump into your community officially. Please accept me as who I am. Thank you!

“And we all, with unveiled faces, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.”

2 Corinthians 3:18

God's Blessings to the Lee Family!



Erica, Colette, Christina, and Eric Lee, say good-bye to their Castro Valley home

My time at SanLo has been a journey. It began 35 years ago when my wife, Colette, and I started bringing our daughters, Christina and Erica. Both of them were baptized, as was I, by Rev. Jim Toda. Thinking back, we've been a part of many facets of the church. My family has supported many events like Craft Day, Harvest Festival, 3 on 3 Basketball Tournament, Pinewood Derby and VBS. I've also been a deacon, trustee, elder and worship team member.

It has been quite a journey to witness God's hand at work through the years. As a deacon I supported the hiring of Scott Shimada as a part time youth director. Today he is the youth pastor and has had a positive effect on the lives of thousands of youths. God directed the church plant in Fremont, where several long-time church members transferred over to support the new church, now called Haven Christian Community Church. I was on the worship team that had the first drummer at the church.

While it may seem like I'm writing about my accomplishments, it is a privilege to serve for the love of Christ. Through it all, God's Word and love was shared with believers and non-believers through the past 35 years.

For Colette and I the journey continues as we begin a new stage in our lives. I have retired and Colette will follow in November of this year. We have a second grandchild on the way and recently moved to Copperopolis, which is near Sonora. While we may be physically apart we will always be connected through our belief in God.

*In Him,
Eric Lee*

Grow SANLO Update



The Elders and staff continue to feel deeply humbled by your giving. We are beyond excited for your amazing generosity to support the GROW SANLO campaign as **we continue to climb over the \$1 million mark** in donations for our capital campaign.

However, we know life continues to be a challenge in the midst of this COVID-19 crisis, and we too have felt this challenge with low giving months for June and July. We do realize that you may be facing financial hardships of your own, so please do not feel obligated to give in your hardship, and if you need assistance, please let us know as we have a crisis fund to serve those in need. **Your faithful giving continues to ensure we are a gospel community of growth for every generation.**

COVID-19 Update: Reopening - Safety First!

The Elders are grateful that we can continue to meet together online through the benefits of technology. We long for the day when we can meet back together in person, and we are tracking of the latest updates from our governing authority in our state and Alameda County, which continues to withhold any indoor services in the high risk purple level.

The Elders have decided to withhold in person services for now, and we will plan for a soft reopening two weeks after the indoor restrictions have lifted within Alameda County. We are committed to a safe and meaningful experience for everyone to worship our Lord Jesus Christ together.

In His Care,
Pastor Eric on behalf of the Elders

Rev. Eric Yata, Pastor (English)
Rev. Brian Tekawa, Marriage/Family Pastor
Pastor Joshua Scott, Young Adult/Worship Pastor
Pastor Scott Shimada, Youth Pastor

Rev. Sunao Shimada, Pastor (Japanese)
Tomoko Shimada, Director of Christian Education
Atsuko Smart, Administrative Assistant

Stan Naruo, Church Administrator
Kathy Tekawa, Communications Administrator

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Like us on our Facebook Page!

Any newsbriefs or articles for “Firmly Rooted” should be at the church office by the second Sunday of each month.

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Dated Material

Week ending Sept. 25, 2020

Newsbriefs

* **Praise God for our new members** who were installed and welcomed in to our church on Sun., Sept. 20. What a wonderful day it was as many of us met over Zoom. We give God praise for **Mildred Kurano, Jennifer Satake, Keiske Satake, Brian Yun, Jennifer Yun, Cassidy To, and Shinja Yoo!**

On Sun., Oct. 4, **Randee Lee and Ran Tao will be baptized and also received into membership.** We will be able to watch live on Zoom! After service prayer is canceled that day.

* **Little House** at home for young families is on Fri., Oct. 9, 6:30 p.m. Sing lively songs, hear a story, and see friends! Contact Michi Shimada at michitds@gmail.com if you're not on the email list.

* After each Sunday worship service, there is a **Zoom prayer and fellowship time.** All are welcome to join in by following the worship service reminder email sent out each week. If you do not receive it, request it from Pastor Josh at josh@slzjcc.org.

SanLo Together Podcast

We have a new and exciting way to connect with each other during this time: SanLo's first ever podcast! “SanLo Together” is about growing and walking together even as we are physically apart. We'll visit with staff, members, and others in our community to hear each other's stories, learn from God's Word, and just grow! You can find us at the link below, on Spotify, and soon, the other major podcast distributors. Check it out!

<https://anchor.fm/sanlo-together>. Questions? Contact Chris Wu.

Pastors Appreciation month is all of October!

We give God thanks for: Pastors Eric, Brian, Scott and Joshua! Also we thank God for our Nichigo pastor, Sunao Shimada. We are truly blessed by their love, care, preaching of God's Word and their prayers and support of our church family. Let's celebrate and thank our pastors! Perhaps this is a great opportunity to send our pastors an email or text and let them know why they are appreciated. May God's abundant blessings be upon all of our pastors as they continue to serve Him with their whole hearts.