

## BOWING IN GRATITUDE

Members at Lahaina Hongwanji Mission were prepping that week for the upcoming Obon Festival on August 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup>. It is ironic and poignant that we fretted a little about possible rain from Hurricane Dora. Then, on Tuesday the 8<sup>th</sup> the winds came . . . and the rest of the story is embedded in us forever, through personal experience, sharing of tales, and from the media. The fires in our beloved Lahaina town displaced about half of our 80 members. They are scattered over parts of Maui, the islands of Hawaii as well as the Mainland. We lost our Temple, Social Hall, Office, Minister's Residence and School Building. Weeks later we learned that one member, Matsu Osato, perished.

Even as we visibly or stoically weep over losses in lives, property, livelihood – one powerfully encouraging force is the overwhelming scope and depth of support we have received. This support has come from the innermost circles of family and ohana, friends, neighbors, from Lahaina Hongwanji members and relations. The support widened to the sangha of Maui Hongwanji temples, Honpa Hongwanji and statewide temples . . . and finally from the larger communities and agencies, local to world-wide.

We bow in gratitude to the following:

- Bishop Toshiyuki Umitani, Honpa Hongwanji Headquarters staff, Social Concerns Committee and Maui Wildfire Emergency Response Adhoc Committee for setting up the Maui Wildfire Disaster Relief Fund.
- Kahului, Wailuku, Lanai and Makawao Hongwanji Temples for offering familiar and comfortable places for Lahaina members to gather, and for invitations to attend their services, as well as donations of gift cards.
- Rev. Kerry Kiyohara and Rev. Shinkai Murakami, who offered their presence at weekly gatherings on Tuesdays and Thursdays at Wailuku and Kahului Hongwanji Temples.
- Rev. Ai Hironaka, who has been a voice for Lahaina Hongwanji and its sangha . . . and, by common experience, for others displaced by the disaster.
- Our temple members, for being LAHAINA HONGWANJI STRONG and helping each other through group texting (cell phones rule!) and heart to heart hanashi.
- Island community groups, foundations and many organizations from afar who graciously bestowed monetary donations for displaced persons --- temple members and others.
- Last but not least, gratitude for: “ground zero” firemen, policemen, National Guardsmen, Red Cross, FEMA, and all others who served and are still serving.

To close on a “feel good” note – one post-fires photo online shows a portion of Lahaina Hongwanji that appears to have resisted the flames. It is a scene with a still relatively green lawn, which was so diligently watered and cared for by our member. On the lawn stands the red yagura ... dutifully repainted late summer for Obon. And the columbarium/nokotsudo still stands upright and seemingly intact. At roadside is the temple ‘kiosk’, and visible inside the glass protection is the name, LAHAINA HONGWANJI, as well as a poster advertising OBON on August 11 & 12, 2023.

We are still awaiting the day we will be allowed back at Lahaina Hongwanji Mission to assess what our future will be. In the meantime, we have a new mailing address since our Post Office was damaged in the fire. Our new mailing address is: Lahaina Hongwanji Mission, P O Box 12911, Lahaina, HI 96761. Our phone number remains as 808-661-6641 but is forwarded to Honpa Hongwanji Mission of Hawaii.

In Gratitude..... LAHAINA HONGWANJI SANGHA