

(5) God's Bunch of Kids

The Koalipea effort had strengthened the ranks of the Aiea congregation, the parish hall was an improvement over the little army building, but almost without saying everyone knew that at the end of the rainbow was a new sanctuary. The little congregation had known sacred moments, and certain places in their brief history had become signposts of good memories, but a monument to God's grace that would stand till the Lord's return was the goal of the worshippers. It was the biggest dream to date, a brand new church built from scratch.

Knowing that the Hawaiian Mission had a policy to match money raised for church capital improvement projects by 50 percent, Elder Kiyabu scheduled an appointment for himself and some of his members with the Mission president. (In an attempt to be a bit politically correct, he will not be named here). Ken Kakazu remembers the meeting vividly. After outlining their plan, Kiyabu asked if the Mission was willing to match what the church would raise. The president went into a discourse about a church not being needed in Aiea, and then turning to Pastor Kiyabu, with body language showing condescension and in a tone projecting almost a sneer (in their remembrance), he let out, ". . . plus Aiea is just a bunch of kids."

Needless to say, Elder Kiyabu and Ken Kakazu, and later the whole congregation, were disappointed. However, this was no time for self-pity or running with tail between *okole*. The president's brush off seemed to energize the "kids" even further. Perhaps it was the adrenalin rush of an "I'll show you" reaction, or perhaps it was a childlike faith that saw beyond cautious institutional maintenance, but for whatever reason, the little Aiea church began to work toward the building of a new sanctuary.

Plans were needed, so Ken Kakazu went and visited his former pastor at the Nuuanu Baptist Church. Since their sanctuary was relatively new he still had the architectural drawings. When Ken explained his hopes, this pastor in pure Christian brotherhood was more than willing to share the plans. Pastor Kiyabu secured a contractor in J. Mukaigawa who gave him a bid to build the sanctuary for \$20,000. What remained now was to raise all the money.

After much thought and discussion, the church came up with a two-fold plan. Mr. Tetsuo Toyama, a businessman who had recently joined Aiea church's issei group, would take Elder Kiyabu and they together would solicit donations from all of Mr. Toyama's business contacts. This was phase one. The second phase would involve the "kids" ingathering the Aiea district in hopes of gaining a large ingathering overflow amount to keep, and then going door to door selling "crisis books." In the book sales they could venture out island wide.

The hand of God was seen throughout the process. It wasn't long before Mr. Toyama's contacts had donated a whopping \$16,000. The "kids" ingathered and soon blanketed the whole island, leeward to windward, selling the crisis books. It was observed that on some

streets, when a priest or religious leader of some other denomination realized what the Aiea members were selling, they would run ahead to the next street to tell the people not to buy the books. Sales nonetheless continued, and soon the remaining \$4000 was raised through the sweat and toil of the “kids.”

Here we must take a side trip that shows how God used even this endeavor to bring glory to the kingdom. One of the homes that Ken Kakazu and Elder Kiyabu knocked on in Halawa Housing in the ingathering phase was that of Chief John Ufuti, a recent immigrant from American Samoa. Ufuti had read a *Signs of the Times* article in Samoan that had convinced him of the 7th day sabbath. The magazine had been delivered by a colporteur on a bicycle named Tini Lam Yuen. So Chief Ufuti, like the kids of the under house Bible study, had begun keeping Saturday on his own. This had alienated him from the council of chiefs and hence his move to Hawaii. Chief Ufuti was overjoyed to have finally found a 7th day keeping church. And after the visit from Elder Kiyabu and Ken, he was soon attending the Aiea church with his wife and daughter.

Chief Ufuti and Dr. James Miyashiro were baptized into the SDA faith in the Aiea swimming pool in 1949. In the last chapter we spoke of what Dr. James went on to do. Chief Ufuti would later start a Bible study in Nanakuli where he had moved to after some from his village in Samoa had immigrated there; and when he moved to back to Samoa, that Bible study group would join with interested others in the Waianae area to become the nucleus for the Waianae SDA Church. Later he would return to American Samoa to find that his stateside “education” had gained him favor amongst the other chiefs again. Chief Ufuti would then use his regained status to declare a piece of land for the building of an SDA church. This church stands even today. Even later when living on the mainland, Chief Ufuti would help start the Vista, California SDA church.

On a visit to American Samoa to conduct an education seminar in 2005, Roy Kakazu (Ken’s younger brother) would incredibly be blessed to visit Chief Ufuti’s grave and to see the church in Samoa he had been instrumental in starting. The events of Chief Ufuti’s life show candidly what can happen as anyone does the work of the Lord and of His church. Many other such stories await us on that other shore.

With the \$20,000 raised to complete the project, construction on the current site was completed toward the end of the year 1949. A sabbath dedication service was planned with the Mission president as the keynote speaker. Ken Kakazu can never forget what Elder Kiyabu said and did as he introduced the president. After giving a proper introduction, Elder Kiyabu stretched his arms out across the inner expanse of the completed sanctuary, and with great pleasure and in the tone of a rascal remarked, “And look at what a bunch of kids can do.”

That the current sanctuary building stands today is no accident, and in retrospect not the work of just any “bunch of kids.” The charter members of Aiea, most of whom were still in their teens when the new sanctuary was dedicated, were not just a group of plantation workers’ children. These “kids” had given their lives to Christ. They had been transformed not only out of a world of economic poverty, but one of spiritual

emptiness. They had seen the miracles and had drunk from the well that never runs dry. They had heard the powerful call of God, and they had come by way of His cleansing blood. The current sanctuary stands today as a gift of grace to the childlike faith of **God's Bunch of Kids**.