

dalupe, Bakersfield, San Mateo, Marysville, Lodi and Fowler.

With the continued establishment of temples, adapting to the new environment, one could argue, was achieved. However, with the advent of the Second World War circumstances surrounding Jodo Shinshu temples would yet again change with the signing of Executive Order 9066 on February 19, 1942 by President Franklin Roosevelt. On April 6, 1944, while in the Topaz Relocation Center in Arizona, Jodo Shinshu temples reorganized themselves as the “Buddhist Churches of America,” and the articles of incorporation were filed with the State of California on May 2, 1944. Throughout this time, the importance of community was highlighted. Although these events could easily have isolated Jodo Shinshu from American culture and society, Jodo Shinshu temples as the Buddhist Churches of America is now nationally recognized through its involvement with institutions such as the Boy Scouts of America in the administration of its Buddhist religious award (Sangha Award) and, ironically enough, the U.S. Department of Defense as a certified Ecclesiastical Endorsing Agent for Military Chaplaincy.

This model of propagation with the temple as a center for a Jodo Shinshu Buddhist community will hopefully also help to highlight the activity of the Vow or how the Buddha has vowed to save all sentient beings as equals. The temple becomes a place of refuge for all to meet with and participate in the immeasurable and inconceivable causes and conditions that can bring people and cultures together.

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Southern District Temples

- Arizona Buddhist Temple
- Buddhist Church of Santa Barbara
- Buddhist Temple of San Diego
- Gardena Buddhist Church
- Guadalupe Buddhist Church
- Los Angeles Homba Hongwanji Buddhist Temple
- Orange County Buddhist Church
- Oxnard Buddhist Temple
- Pasadena Buddhist Temple
- San Fernando Valley Hongwanji Buddhist Temple
- San Luis Obispo Buddhist Church
- Senshin Buddhist Temple
- Venice Hongwanji Buddhist Temple
- Vista Buddhist Temple
- West Los Angeles Buddhist Temple



Buddhist Churches of America

<http://buddhistchurchesofamerica.org>



The Jodo Shinshu Temple in America



Rev. John Iwohara, Venice Hongwanji Buddhist Temple

Some key words used by Jodo Shinshu include terms like *immeasurable*, and *inconceivable*. In particular, these terms are used to describe the Buddha and the Pure Land of the Buddha. Although these terms help us to understand the enormity of what it is that we can be a part of in living our lives as Jodo Shinshu Buddhists, how does one come to understand that which is immeasurable and inconceivable? In other words, if Amida Buddha were to simply remain in the realm of being immeasurable and inconceivable, then we could never come to know of Amida Buddha or of the Pure Land.

Followers of Jodo Shinshu, or those who have experienced that which is immeasurable and inconceivable, in trying to share this experience and preserve the teachings that made the experience possible, have over the centuries developed and provided us a powerful resource to help us not only understand but to experience the truth of both the immeasurable and the inconceivable: they have given us the temple.

As the Jodo Shinshu temple developed in Japan, it began first as a mausoleum for the Founder of Jodo Shinshu or Shinran Shonin. In trying to emphasize the fact that Jodo Shinshu has at its core the realization of the fulfilled life in the present, and not just the simple yearning for a reward in the afterlife for having endured a lifetime, Kakunyo Shonin, the great-grandson of Shinran Shonin, also worked to transform the mausoleum into a temple. In order to accomplish this, Kakunyo Shonin had to leave the mausoleum in order to talk to and try to convince the various Jodo Shinshu followers throughout the countryside to support the conversion of the mausoleum into a temple. Ultimately, this would result in the establishment of the Hongwanji or the *Temple of the Primal Vow*. He would also establish himself as the third spiritual leader of the tradition now known with the title of *Gomonshu*. Kakunyo Shonin in leaving his “home base” and going *to* the people, worked

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to show how Jodo Shinshu Buddhists are all part of the same activity of the Primal Vow of Amida Buddha. This activity helped to demonstrate how one was *embraced and not forsaken*, and how it is the activity of the Buddha, as expressed through the *Power of the Vow*, that brings us to realize immeasurable and inconceivable life. This model of propagation would also serve as a template for the local temple where the resident priest would leave the temple to make his or her rounds to the families that were affiliated with the temple. It is a model of propagation that can remind us why the statue of Amida Buddha is standing and not seated in meditation at Jodo Shinshu temples.

In America, a completely different view of religious life existed. Under the headline “They Teach The Buddhist Faith” the September 12, 1899 issue of the San Francisco Chronicle reported on the establishment of the first Jodo Shinshu mission in the continental United States. The article begins as follows:

Two Buddhist priests from Japan, Dr. Shuye Sonoda and the Rev. Kakuryo Nishijima, have come to San Francisco to minister to the spiritual wants of their countrymen and at the same time to undertake the work of converting the Christians of this city to their faith. On Wednesday they will open a Buddhist mission at 807 Polk Street. Here religious services will be held every Sabbath, for they are willing to conform to the national day of worship, and from this as a center it is proposed to circulate printed tracts which shall set forth the merits and beauties of the ancient Buddhist faith, as compared to the doctrines of Christianity.

Religious observances, the article reports, “will be held every Sabbath, for they are willing to conform to the national day of worship.” Adaptations to new environment could be seen immediately. However, the article also included the following preliminary introduction to Buddhism for the American public. We believe that we are governed only by law, not by any personified God. We have within us the highest guidance, the Karma. Before people can comprehend the truth they must be freed from delusion. God is not the creator, but the created. We ourselves create God. He is not a real existence, but a figment of the human imagination. ... I firmly believe that Buddhism is a better moral guide than Christianity.

Although adaptations were clearly made, Buddhism was also presented as “*a better moral guide than Christianity*.” During its first decade Jodo Shinshu was able to establish 20 temples. The temples were established across the West Coast in the towns and cities of San Francisco, Sacramento, Fresno, Vacaville, Seattle, San Jose, Oakland, Portland, Los Angeles, White River, Placer, Watsonville, Stockton, Hanford, Gua-