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SAN FRANCISCO (UMNS)---Forty winters ago, more than 120,000 Japanese-Americans read with disbelief notices that gave them five days to dispose of their property before being forced out of their homes. The Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor had produced an unprecedented government reaction--relocating all Japanese residents in four states, citizen and alien alike, to remote camps for the duration of World War II.

This summer and fall, a new attempt is underway to gain some measure of redress for losses sustained by those people, two-thirds of them U.S. citizens. One of the pleas being made is that the "extraordinary measures" taken to incarcerate Japanese-Americans in 1941-42 should be matched by "extraordinary measures now... to allow us to have our day in court."

After many years of efforts, a Commission on Wartime Relocation and Internment of Civilians is now taking testimony and doing research to review the impact of the evacuation and its justification and to recommend to Congress "appropriate remedies." Proposals range from cash payments to specific persons, perhaps \$25,000 each, to more general funds.

When the removal order came, there had been Methodist work among the Japanese in this country for more than 60 years, and there were some 30 Japanese Methodist congregations. All of these churches were closed "for the duration" and all suffered deterioration if not vandalism.

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Thirty ministers and approximately 5,000 members went into the camps.

All of today's Japanese congregations, still predominantly in California, have some members who experienced the evacuation.

The 1980 General Conference of the United Methodist Church urged a study of the people's "incarceration without trial" and urged Congress to approve "appropriate remedies."

After years of pleading for some redress, California-Nevada Annual Conference, where most Japanese churches are located, in 1981 called on the new U.S. commission to "affirm the need for the United States to redress the victims through the passage of legislation calling for reparations." The conference reminded the commission that the evacuation, "despite the government's claim of military necessity... proved to be made solely on the basis of race, there having been not a single case of sabotage or espionage committed by such persons and there having been no such sweeping action taken against Americans of German or Italian ancestry," despite those countries' enemy status.

In testimony at the San Francisco hearing in August, the Rev. Lloyd K. Wake of San Francisco's Glide Memorial Church told some of his experiences and feelings. He recalled how in August of 1942 "our whole family was sent to the concentration camp in Poston, Ariz.," and how his father "was denied the satisfaction of harvesting the fruits of his labor for the first time in 32 years, on his Central California farm. "He never saw that farm again."

Speaking also on behalf of the National Council for Japanese-American Redress, Mr. Wake noted that, despite the numerous "heart-rending stories of pain, suffering and humiliation, many more have decided not to share this most intimate part of their lives, because of their past experiences with government agencies" and consequent loss of trust.

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Mr. Wake said the commission has no need to review the facts about the impact of incarceration, because "the injustice, the racism, the military and political intrigue that surrounded Order 9066 are well documented." Instead, he said, the commission should determine the most feasible method of monetary redress.

He pleaded especially that it recommend legislation which would enable a class action suit to try "the full record of our government's action." He pointed to present barriers, such as statutes giving the government immunity against suit and the statute of limitations. Calling for "extraordinary measures" to permit this in response to the 1942 action, he reminded the commission that "political expediency and the 'mood of Congress' was what led to the most outrageous incarceration of a whole mass of people in 1942."

The California-Nevada resolution was presented at the San Francisco hearing by the Rev. Roy I. Sano, who teaches at the Pacific School of Religion in Berkeley, Calif. Also a former resident of the Poston camp, he described "the toll which redress payments will only mitigate in a token way, ...the damage to our very personhood, our identities."

Noting that one writer had depicted the Japanese as "a sword and a chrysanthemum," Dr. Sano said one of the results of the evacuation centers was that for 25 years after World War II "we buried the swordly part of our identity as a price for an albeit shallow acceptance and precarious advancements. We became all chrysanthemum without a sword." He added, "The ethnic movements from the late 1960s and early 1970s have tried to restore a wholeness to a distorted people. The struggle for reparations represents one of a continuing series of efforts."

Dr. Sano and others recalled that under 1948 legislation the federal government had paid \$38 million in claims by evacuees, "when the Federal Reserve System itself estimated our losses totaled \$400 million."

U.S. Rep. Norman Y. Mineta of California, a United Methodist layman who entered a relocation camp when he was 10 years old, told the commission his hope that its report would "guarantee that an incident like this will never happen again."



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In a recent book, "Ministry in the Assembly and Relocation Centers," a retired United Methodist minister, the Rev. Lester Suzuki of Berkeley, told how the Japanese constituted fewer than one-tenth of one percent of U.S. population in 1942. Two-thirds of them were born in the U.S., hence citizens, while the rest were at that time denied citizenship by law. He wrote that the evacuation orders reminded him of one of St. Paul's experiences in Jerusalem, when he asked the centurion, "Is it lawful for you to scourge a man who is a Roman citizen and uncondemned?"

He recalled that the evacuees could take only their bedding, toilet article dishes and a little extra clothing. They were given five days to dispose of both real and personal property. Some was stored by the government, but with no insurance. Few persons had receipts for goods, sold mostly at sacrifice prices. At assembly centers, most were moved into hastily transformed horse stalls at race tracks.

Dr. Suzuki recalled that the church's Pacific Japanese Provisional Conference, which had gained that status only in 1940, met in 1942 at the Santa Anita, Calif., Assembly Center (formerly a race track) because there were more Methodists there than elsewhere. However, most churches could not be represented.

While Methodists did much to minister to the evacuees, said Dr. Suzuki, "responsible Methodist bishops and strong Methodist pulpit preachers, especially of the West Coast, were not too helpful in visiting the centers," or in "speaking against the injustice" of the evacuation. He held that the church "should be in the foreground of any reparations movement, or the righting of a unique wrong."

In beginning the series of commission hearings, the presiding officer, Joan Z. Bernstein of Washington, D.C., stressed, "There has never been an inquiry into this sad episode." Holding "we do not intend to conduct an inquisition or a trial," she said the commission wants to "understand what happened and why, to focus on ways to protect against such events in the future," as well as to consider appropriate redress. While the evacuation was ended in 1946, the order was not rescinded for 34 years.



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The commission also is looking into the war-time evacuation and internment of more than 1,000 Aleuts living on the islands off Alaska, a situation even less well-known than that of the Japanese.

Among members of the commission is Dr. Arthur Flemming, United Methodist layman who is chairman of the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights.

September hearings are scheduled 9-11 in Seattle, 15 in Anchorage, 17 in Unalaska, Aleutian Islands, 19 in St. Paul, Privilof Islands, and 22-23 in Chicago.

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