Jane Kaihatsu
Narrator

Ashli Lucio
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Interviewer

Jane Kaihatsu: JK
Ashli Lucio: AL

Interviewed April 20, 2023

Abstract: Jane Kaihatsu is a member of Christ Church of Chicago and serves as the church administrator. Jane has been a member her entire life, except for a few years that she lived out of state. This oral history took place at Immanuel Lutheran Church in Evanston, IL, where Jane works as a parish administrator. The interview is approximately 55 minutes long. The conversation discusses the changes that have occurred within Christ Church of Chicago during Jane's lifetime, the importance of social justice issues to the Christ Church of Chicago's congregation, and the importance of community, especially during times of healing. The interview took place as a part of the *Gathering Places* project at Loyola University of Chicago. For more information, see http://beta.gatheringplaceschicago.com/.

Ashli Lucio (AL): Give me one second. I've done this before, but I haven't exactly used this particular recording device.

Jane Kaihatsu (JK): Oh, it's really fancy. Yeah.

AL: Oh, yeah. It's borrowed from Loyola.

AL: Alright. So today is April 20th, 2023. It's about 2:00 in the afternoon. This is Ashli Lucio. And then go ahead, Ms.

JK: My name is Jane Kaihatsu.

AL: Kaihatsu. All right. And just a baseline, we have your permission to record right now?

Kaihatsu: Yes, we do. Yeah.

AL: Okay.

JK: Yes, you do.

AL: [*laughs*] No, that's good. That's good. Okay. So, yeah, let's just scoot a little closer. It will be easier for us. Right. So how long have you lived in Rogers Park or in—not in Rogers Park, in Chicago, rather?

JK: Okay. I was born and raised in Chicago, and currently I live in Park Ridge, which is a northwest suburb close to O'Hare Airport. So I was born in 1957 at what was known as Wesley Memorial Hospital; it's now a part of Northwestern Memorial Hospital. I was—my first home, was in Old Town off North Avenue and Wells, and then when I was two years old, we moved to Jefferson Park on the far northwest side. And then in 1965, I moved to—my family moved to Park Ridge, where I'm living right now, taking care of my mother, who's going to be 95 years old. But despite moving out of the city, we have always been a member of Christ Church of Chicago.

AL: Yeah. So you just grew up in the church? You never have left?

JK: Well, I lived out of town for a while. From 1983 to 1986, I lived in San Francisco, and then I came back to Chicago for three years. And then from 1989 to 1998, I lived in Japan. I lived first in a semi-rural town about 40 miles northwest of Tokyo, where I was teaching English. Then I moved to Tokyo itself, and then I moved to Kyoto for a year, and then moved back to Tokyo where I spent the rest of my days in Japan, and then returned to Chicago.

AL: Cool. So was it just your parents who joined Christ Church or was it your grandparents or who was it in your family that decided to join?

JK: Oh, that's a good question. My mother and father originally joined Christ Church of Chicago as they were invited to church service by friends of theirs. Both my parents were interned in the World War II internment camps for Japanese-Americans, but they were in separate camps. They both came to Chicago independently. They met here and got married and then decided to stay. Some of their relatives actually returned to the West Coast or went further on to the East Coast, but my parents decided to stay. And then they—their circle of friends were other Nisei, second-generation Japanese-Americans like themselves. And they invited—this one couple invited my parents, who didn't have any—no, they had one child—my older brother at the time. And that first Sunday happened to be Easter Sunday. And my brother got an Easter basket, and then they were invited to church again—there was a Halloween party for children. And at that time, the Sansei generation, which is my generation, was really starting to boom, and there were a lot of activities for kids. And my mom, who was actually raised a Buddhist, thought, "Gee, this church is so generous and nice, maybe we ought to join."

My paternal grandmother was in Chicago, too, and she had actually been converted to Christianity prior to the war. When she immigrated to Los Angeles back in the early 1920s, she became a Christian because my grandfather thought that was the best way to become an American. And so she also wanted to join Christ Church of Chicago because they had Japanese language services for people of her generation.

AL: Yeah, great. So was there—-you grew up in the church—

JK: —Yes.

AL: But was there ever a moment when you realized like, “Oh, this is my church. This is where I was supposed to be?”

JK: I would have to say not really. There wasn't any one aha moment. And I think because I grew up in the church and I have known the church since I was a baby in the nursery—in fact, one of my closest friends—we tell the story to others that we've known each other before we knew each other because we were both babies in the nursery, and our moms used to talk to each other. And we've just kept this unbroken friendship for 65 years. So I guess I—it wasn't like, “Oh, I belong here” or anything like that. It was just really a part of my life. Just something like a tradition that we did; it was a circle of friends that I knew. And it's just something that's very natural. Yeah, I guess. Yeah. There was no one moment per say for me.

AL: So you mentioned a little bit about this circle of friends. Can you tell me a little bit about the community at Christ Church?

JK: Okay. The church started mainly as a collection of Japanese-Americans. Most of them had been interned in the camps and they founded the church, but there were other people who are not interned. There were people from Hawaii who were students; they came, too, so—but the bulk being people who had this shared experience during World War II and then shared culture of which Christianity kind of surrounded it.

And when I was growing up in the sixties and seventies, that was kind of a different time for my parents—for me, because we were becoming more socially conscious. So it wasn't just a community of faith and ritual that maybe my parents were experiencing initially. But for me, when I was in middle school and high school, the Vietnam War was raging, and Christ Church of Chicago was part of the Congregational sect of—Congregational turned into the United Church of Christ, the UCC. And the UCC was more progressive; they called it liberal. Back then, they were anti-war. And so these kinds of things about the church, about identity—first was black power and then liberation theology—really affected my outlook on life. And so I felt that our community was one where we cared about people in a way that was not really so much faith-based, but also social justice.

And the community itself, you know, we had all age ranges back then in the sixties and seventies when I was growing up. [We had] a large Sunday School; we had two youth groups, a Junior Pilgrim Fellowship and the Senior Pilgrim Fellowship. There–the Nisei, my parents' generation, were very adamant about, I think, having a very healthy and thriving community for us kids to grow up in. And one thing that was very strong—I did not participate in—but there was an athletic association. It was called the Chicago Nisei Athletic Association. And it was not only Christ Church, but it was another Japanese Christian church, and then the Buddhist temples as well. And we could all compete with softball, volleyball, and basketball. And that was important because as Asian-Americans—Japanese Americans—often we were too small to be on the school team. So we had the chance to compete [through church]. I played violin so I didn't want to hurt my fingers. I was not athletic at all, but my brothers and sisters were. And that was a big part of the community in the sixties and seventies, and it was a lot of fun. I may not have participated, but I went to the games. So I think it was it was just well-rounded, and as about as both Japanese and American as you can get with faith and with social justice in mind as well.

One of the big things that did affect me, too, was we had a pastor who talked about the United Farm Workers and Cesar Chavez and his efforts to secure workers' rights. And so we were told to boycott lettuce and grapes. And for decades—long after that had been resolved—I did not buy, you know, head lettuce or green grapes. And it was funny, I ran into somebody at the Unitarian Church in Evanston, and she said the same thing; it was only–probably maybe about ten years ago that she started buying, you know, grapes again. But that, you know, made a very strong impression. And I'm proud to be a Christian and part of a community that supports things like that. It's not just—-I forget how that expression goes—"Talks the talk, but we walk the walk too."

AL: Yeah, I remember when I was at Christ Church, [I] saw the banner out front—the Rainbow banner.

JK: Oh, right.

AL: And Elaine had told us about how at one point Christ Church had had a LGBT, Asian-American support group or something like that.

JK: Yes, yes, yes. We had a gay pastor almost twenty years–-fifteen years ago. And so there's been a lot of diversity and just, you know, seeing people as people. And I think, unfortunately, the Protestant Christian movement sometimes gets pegged by the loudest voices in the media. But there's all different kinds of viewpoints and perspectives. And I'm glad—we're in the minority in many ways, but I'm glad to be a part of it, though.

AL: Yeah, that's great. So what is your favorite part of being a member? Is it the acceptance or what is it?

JK: Well, I think it's hard to say that there's one favorite part. There are many aspects. In that—it's a little complicated, too, because being part of a community as long as I have has meant that my favorite parts—what I like about the community—has evolved as I have evolved. Actually, when I was younger, growing up in Park Ridge and most of the members were from the city, I felt very much isolated, and I didn't want to go to church all the time because I wanted to do other things with my friends in Park Ridge, but my parents insisted that it was, you know, important for us to be part of a community. So my feelings changed a bit. But now I like the familiarity, the comfort level of going where—going to a place where, you know, you've known people for a long time and, you know, we work together well; we care about each other. And I've always said the difference between like your work friends, for example, or your school friends or something like that is that a church community—the members, the congregation—is there thick and thin. And they know me, you know, not because of work or anything, but we're there because we care about each other first. And then, you know, whatever other details of either person is [*unclear*]. Where work is, you know, you're drawn by this work situation, your company identification or a club. Church is a little different because it's about caring, and people come to care for you during your times of need, and that's not something that they think about too much. They know they have to do it, and they want to do it.

AL:: Yeah, that's beautiful.

JK: Oh.

AL: Really. [*laughter*] Let's see. So is there a time that you felt super welcomed or super supported by the community? If you could just tell me a little bit about like a specific moment where you have felt that support?

JK: Yes. In 2000, my younger sister became brain injured. She had an unfortunate accident. And because we grew up in the church—I have two brothers and two sisters—everybody knew who she was, you know. You know, [they] knew our parents and me. And so they have been supportive, you know, from the very beginning and, you know, tried to help out. She's a very difficult case. She has to live in the nursing home now. And the pastor, too, at the time, was very supportive [and] was a huge influence on me. And [she] said something to me that I actually hadn't thought about was—and she said that "I'm going to help you grieve your sister because the sister that you knew is gone." And that was so true. And that perspective was very helpful because then we could move forward in her care. Because of her brain damage, you know, she—her personality changed, her mobility changed; she became physically disabled; she was, of course, cognitively disabled. She has profound short-term memory loss. And she wasn't the person that we knew prior to the accident. So would I have gotten that [advice] anywhere else? I don't think so. Not from the, you know, hundreds of medical staff that I've dealt with over the years. This happened in 2000, so I've been caring for my sister for twenty-three years, and the church has been with me the entire way. But from that first moment when everyone had heard what happened, you know, it was just really an important moment in our family's history with the church and everything that the church really is created to be.

AL: Wow, that's a lot. So you mentioned when you were younger, you didn't want to go to church. You wanted to do other things, be with your friends. And I think that kind of speaks to your personal religious life. Has the church impacted your personal religious life in any way?

JK: Oh, yeah, I guess I didn't feel very religious [*laughter*] when I was younger. And I'm surprised at myself, too. As I have gotten older–-particularly once I hit, you know, my mid-sixties now—it's, you know, it's just really interesting how spirituality has become more important to me. And faith. Even I would say as recently as ten years ago, I did not feel the way that I feel now about faith. And I think when you hit a certain age, you start looking back at everything that you've done in life and who is there to support you and what is it that keeps you going. And for me, I think faith and—you know, there's lots of scriptures—the Bible is huge—but to me, the most important one is the golden rule. What they call the golden rule is to, you know, be kind to others or treat others the way you would want to be treated. And throughout all the books in the Bible—different prophets, Jesus—in so many different ways are saying the same thing. It's that one basic tenant. And that has really inspired me.

AL: Yeah. Do you think—so you said age was a factor in you coming back and really spiritua[lly]—Do you think COVID had anything to do with that or no?

JK: No, not really. I, fortunately, have not known anyone who has passed away because of COVID, so—yeah, I—it was a huge inconvenience. [*laughter*] COVID.

AL: Yeah, it was. It just—it's such a big event that—

JK: —Yes.

AL: —the timing coincided. I wondered if it had an effect.

JK: Yeah. I think for some people it did. And there has been many profound changes in society, and this is—the changes that I'm seeing, which I believe are from COVID, are not good. They're very negative. There's a lot of anger and danger. And at the same time, many churches lost members of—have even closed at a time when I think churches are needed the most to kind of be an anchor again. And that's just Christian[ity]. I think all faiths probably suffered the same fate because of COVID. But the faith-based organizations really need to somehow come back into society and be a foundation for what is lacking now: a moral compass. I think. People lost their moral compasses during COVID. And it's just like, "Woah." Not—I mean, you know, it's horrific to read the news. It's getting to the point where it's very difficult to listen to the news. Every day, somebody is doing great harm to another person. Why?

AL: I totally get that. How did—just while we're on the subject of COVID—how did COVID impact Christ Church? What changes did you see?

JK: Well, we have lost members in terms of people who were very active and have not returned. Even though the church was closed—you know, during the lockdown for only about a year and a half—many, surprisingly, people that were so active prior to the pandemic have not returned at all. And the other change was that we jumped on to technology. Now in, I think, Protestant news and things, there was a lot of talk prior to the pandemic that to reach young people you have to go to technology, do live streaming. Excuse me. We were kind of forced into it, and so we did purchase some equipment, but I kind of wonder if—because I don't think the numbers are there [*laughs*]. The people who are live streaming are actually not young people. They're—so but we made the leap like everyone else did. So those are changes. And in some ways—we've reached people that we would not have reached who are out-of-state, and so that's wonderful. But in the other sense, I wonder if it was creating a new group of church goers who were more viewers rather than the doers that we used to be prior to the pandemic, you know. Getting into our service projects and things like that, the numbers aren't there. It's hard to do now. So, yeah, just losing numbers—bodies—was a big change.

AL: I'm sure. Yeah. So—do you—what do you think the future is? Do you think it's going to bounce back? You're going to get those people to come back? Or do you think they've—I don't know. What do you think is going to happen next for Christ Church?

JK: I think about what is going to happen to Christ Church all the time [*laughter*]. It's so difficult to know. I mean, I went—[*phone rings*]-should I—it's a strange number. Should I take it? Is it [the recorder] one that will pause? Okay.

[The recorder is paused for a moment while JK answers the office phone.]

AL: [*whispers*] Give me one second. [*normal voice*] Alright, go ahead.

JK: Okay, okay. The Future of Christ Church. On one hand, I want to be optimistic that there—as the rest of society becomes more engaged again—you know, everyone's saying normal, but I think we have to create a new normal. I think for the church, too, there will be a different normal—a new normal for us as well. And I'm hoping that not only the people who stopped coming will come back, but we will attract new people. For example, the most logical choice would be around the neighborhood—would be in that Rogers Park area.

Oh, we've made it a point to have a lot of events outside, and we have a very large courtyard or front yard—it's not a courtyard—front yard space where we've been holding events and people have been walking by, you know, with their kids or walking their dogs and stop by. And we're hoping that they'll come in.

The church itself was built by German immigrants, so it's kind of imposing. It's very brick. There's these heavy wooden doors. It's really not inviting. It's like once those doors closed [*laughs*], you know? But we're hoping if they see the members outside and that we're—you know, we're still mostly Asian-American—but they see other diversity and age groups that they'll be attracted and come in and want to join our community.

AL: Yeah. Have these been like concerts or fellowship picnics or what kinds of events are you holding outside?

JK: Prior to the pandemic, we actually used to have worship service outside. We'd drag, you know, electric piano out and we have tents for shade and things. We've had some picnics, and in the last two summers, we've had concerts. We called it Music in the Garden where, you know, it's free; we sell some food and drinks and have different musicians come and play, and those were well-received. The most recent event they had was an Easter egg hunt on the day before Easter, and people came from the neighborhood, and I think children had a good time. So it's all—because the building is so imposing with all the brick and heavy wooden doors, I think it makes sense to go out and meet potential members where they are, and we have to do it outside.

AL: Yeah, that's a great philosophy. Are you seeing improvement in that—in like your Sunday numbers?

JK: The improvement—once in a while there might be one or two visitors. It hasn't been flooding in, but that's what I think we are thinking of working on–is how to be more welcoming. What steps can we take once visitors come into the building? And the other part is trying to step up our programming again. Right now, there's not a lot of programming going on and service projects, but as more people come back, we hope we can get more.

[*metallic clanging*]

AL: [*laughs*] There's the mail.

JK: There's the mail. Yeah.

AL: So let's see. Who is—you mentioned the pastor earlier that you said had a profound impact on you. Are there any other people who have had a profound impact on you? Or if you want to speak a little bit more about that pastor?

JK: Oh, okay. The different pastors have had impacts with me because they've brought different—they brought to our attention as a congregation and, you know—my pet projects of social justice and actions that we can take. So we've had different pastors. There's Pastor McPherson, the one who talked about the United Farm Workers. That helped me gain perspective and learn about the outer world. I would say everybody in the Nisei generation—all of my parents' generation. I have just enormous respect for them because they just worked so hard—they worked hard that in everything that they did, but—building a strong church community. They showed what discipline, organization, and love and care for each other can be. They really walked the walk. They really looked for things where they could help people.

In the early days, in the 1950s, the Woman's Fellowship was sending clothing—I believe that they were made making—to orphans in Japan. And, you know, I'm thinking here they had come out of internment camps with like nothing themselves, but yet they still found that as soon as they got a little bit of money and prosperous themselves, they were going to help, you know, people in foreign countries. And then it evolved to people in the Chicago area.

We were one of the founding churches of a group called the Night Ministry. And those are pastors that were walking the streets at night of Lakeview looking for runaway teens. And when I was in high school and heard about it, I thought, you know, of kids like myself. But what they didn't speak about back then in the 70s—-most of them were gay teens. They had been kicked out of their homes, and with nowhere to go, they ended up on the streets of Chicago. And of course, when I learned that, I was just like really heartbroken. I was like, "Oh, I'm so glad, you know, we tried to help them." And now the Night Ministry is a very huge organization. It's really grown to help all kinds of people who are unhoused and providing medical care and not just counseling and things like that. So did that answer your question?

AL: No. Yeah.

JK: Okay.

AL: Yeah, you did. You did.

JK: Okay.

AL: Yeah. So how do you think you have impacted the community or have you? Maybe you haven't.

JK: Yeah, I don't know if I've had an impact. I don't see myself as a person having an impact. I've contributed. I think the ways I've tried to contribute is to be supportive of projects and serve when I could. I had one role as a Pastoral Relations Committee chairman—and this is the committee that supports the pastor because it's a tough job basically to be a pastor. And so maybe that—because I had been the chair of the Pastor Relations Committee to support the pastors—is how I ended up as a parish administrator in my current job, supporting the pastor at this Lutheran church [Emanuel Lutheran where the interview took place]. Right now, I do a lot of the communications for the church[Christ Church of Chicago]—the weekly e-news--and I really enjoy it. I love to write and so I'm having a lot of fun doing this because nobody's really said I can't do anything, so I do whatever I want. [*laughs*] And so I'm really enjoying that. I just like to think I contribute. Rather than having an impact, just making a contribution to help the church keep going.

AL: Yeah. So what do you think keeps the church going? What holds it together?

JK: Oh, very good question. What is our engine? [*laughter*] What keeps it going? I think it's the bonds of people. Having a church is, of course, faith, but there's also assembly and the gathering of people who share a common, not just a goal, but a sensibility of how a life should be lived—how one's life should be lived. And that is following, you know, the golden rule—to being kind to others, to caring for others. And I–that ethos, I think, is very strong in our church. Even though the numbers are dwindling, that ethos is keeping it going, and if that can hold on and then be felt by newcomers, that will cause the church to grow. I think.

AL: So if you could only preserve one story from your time at Christ Church of Chicago, what would that be?

JK: [*whispers*] One story. [*normal voice*] I think—well, the strongest story for me personally was the love, care, and support that I've gotten since my sister became brain injured that started back in 2000 and has continued to this day. So that sustains me, and it's a sustaining story. And, you know, I was just thinking about live streaming and technology and things like that—I just recently had hip surgery, so I had to stay away from the church for almost ten weeks, and that's—other than being out of town—that's the longest I've ever stayed away from church when I was actually in town. And the live streaming just didn't do it for me. You know, I could see everybody, and they could read my chats on Facebook—because we do Facebook versus Zoom—but it just really felt good to be back. When I was finally able to drive and get back in church in person, it made me realize how important the assembly—the gathering—is to my interpretation of faith. It's not just picking up a book or, you know, listening to videos or, you know, watching a live stream. It is doing it with other people.

AL: So your faith is about the interaction of people?

JK: Right. Whether we're together or we're serving others. Helping others.

AL: Yeah. So what is the greatest challenge of being part of this congregation? You know, is there something that you want to see changing?

JK: Yeah. Yes. I think the greatest challenge is getting too comfortable with each other. And that's not a sustainable—to use, a corporate term—a sustainable model for growth. We will not grow if we just stay very comfortable and do things with each other. We have to go outside of our comfort zone—another cliché—and really try to be welcoming to others and find other people who want to share our vision of, you know, caring for other people in the greater world and also caring for the environment.

I forgot to mention that. That's very important, too. The idea came in the Christian churches maybe ten years ago about stewardship for the planet. And stewardship is a very religious term, but I think it really applies here that we as people of faith have to care for the planet. We were caring for each other. Now we really have to care for the planet because, you know, everywhere you look, there's so much damage being done. So that's another thing that we can do to help everybody.

AL: Has that stewardship principle kind of what then—what inspired like the community gardens and stuff that you have outside the church?

JK: Yes, I think so. You know, making—you know, in the urban setting, there's not a whole lot of green space, but I think that was something that the people who have that garden ministry—I, unfortunately—I like plants but I usually kill them, so [*laughter*] I have to stay away. I can admire, but I probably shouldn't get involved. But they really wanted to beautify the grounds, and I think that is a real large testament of God, of, you know, what our universe is, of what nature is, and how we need to care for it. And we deliberately, you know, don't have a fence around the church so the neighbors are welcome to walk right up to the door. And people do; they sit on the steps; they talk on the phone; they drink; they eat ice cream; you know, they walk around and that's fantastic. And I hope that they are enjoying the different plants and, you know, greenery around.

AL: Yeah. So can you describe just a typical worship service at Christ Church?

JK: Well, it's been changing a lot, [*laughs*] actually. The pastor sets the tone for the worship service, and so right now we have a transitional pastor. But Christ Church being part of the UCC—the United Church of Christ is more relaxed, I would say, in terms of what the structure, the order of worship is. We love music, so we always—we had an organist or someone who plays the prelude music. We're always singing hymns. We have—often rather than having a lot of scripture, we have more poetry or sayings from different scholars and poets who are—who the pastors thought had words or sayings that would guide us in life. I have one up on the bulletin board here. [*Papers moving*] [*laughter*] It's actually by—I think she's—or he—is Iranian. Rumi. An Iranian poet. And this actually came from worship service about the guest house, which was read to me, and I just liked it so much, I wanted to keep it and hang it.

AL: Will you go ahead and read it?

JK: Okay. This pastor, Brandon Simmons, read this to us one Sunday as part of our call to worship. Rather than a typical call-and-response from the liturgy, he had this, and it's called “The Guest House” by the poet Rumi:

"This being human is a guest house. Every morning, a new arrival, a joy, a depression, a meanness. Some momentary awareness comes as an unexpected visitor. Welcome and entertain them all, even if they're a crowd of sorrows who violently sweep your house empty of its furniture, still treat each guest honorably. He may be clearing you out for some new delight. The dark thought, the shame, the malice. Meet them at the door, laughing, and invite them in. Be grateful for whoever comes because each has been sent as a guide from beyond."

So sayings that in poetry like that is what I think makes our worship special. You know, we'll have—then he'll [the pastor] have a sermon about current events and, you know, with the scripture or something that's happened, you know, maybe in his life or someone's life. And our current pastor, Erin, a transitional pastor, she does the same thing. Then we close with—or we have the offering, and then prayers where we stand up and give our prayer requests. Either—we call it joys and concerns. And with a Japanese-American congregation, that is kind of difficult because nobody likes to stand up and talk and stick out. In Japanese, there is a phrase that says the nail that sticks up gets hammered, so [*laughs*] it's kind of in our DNA not to stick out. But it's, you know, it's part of the assembly; it's part of sharing, and we're not in Japan. We're in Chicago. So but we have that and it's kind of a good way to bond. And then we sing about it, another hymn, and then have announcements and closing about things like that. So I think it's pretty typical. Compared to the Lutheran Church where I'm working right now—the Lutheran Church here is very structured, very high church. There's a very—there's prescribed liturgy every single week that's followed exactly. Where the UCC is on the far end of the spectrum. It can be more organic, unstructured, but still achieve the same purpose, I think.

AL: Yeah. So what is the most meaningful or significant activity that takes place at the church?

JK: I think—a gathering—there's two gatherings where we're either doing a service project—and the most recent one would be the Christmas drive. This year, we partnered with Refugee One. In the past, we've partnered with Heartland Alliance, where a family or families are chosen for us to assist—adopt—and it's usually with material things. You know, clothing, household items, things like that. That's a big activity with the reduced numbers since the pandemic. And the other one was the Easter Egg Hunt, and that—it was fundraising, but it was for the Music Ministry. We need to hire an organist, so—which is something that's very close to the people—the music—so we had an activity of organization where we, you know, [do] events and programing and things like that. So those are the programs or activities right now that are our most vibrant in the church.

AL: Yeah. So when you moved away—because you mentioned living in San Francisco, in Japan—what did you miss the most?

JK: I did miss people. I missed the community, the people that I had known for years. Not—and I actually I joined the church in Japan—in Tokyo. It was full of expats. And it just it was overwhelming to be with with so many people that I didn't know. Not that anyone was unkind, but I just kind of felt lost in the shuffle, and I missed the small community, the closeness that we had. And just—when you live overseas in particular, you're constantly explaining yourself. You know, who you are, where you're from, and this and that, and sometimes you want to go in at the end of the week—or actually the beginning of the week—to a sanctuary and just kind of let the

world outside disappear for a while. And you find out, you know, what is inside of you, what do you need to be replenished to keep going? And so I had missed that—the intimacy. The church in Tokyo was quite—several hundred, maybe close to a thousand people at that time—and that was the largest church service I had ever attended, regularly.

AL: [*laughs*] Yeah. That's a big change from here.

JK: Yeah. [*laughs*] Yeah, it was big.

AL: Yeah. So what do you think the founders of Christ Church of Chicago would think about your community today?

JK: I think on one hand, they would be happy that it sustained for seventy-five years. This—2023 is our 75th anniversary.

AL: Yay.

JK: And it's mind-boggling to think, you know, seventy-five years ago, oh, my goodness. So I think they would be very proud that we had done that. I think they would be a little disappointed, though, too, that their—the founders now—children and grandchildren and great-grandchildren are not as involved in the church. I wonder if they would understand, you know, the technological age and how things have changed. So I think that would be disappointing to them. The building that we're in right now in Christ Church that was purchased I think in 1998 or 1999, and I think the founders would be happy that we've hung onto it. We've actually paid the building off—

AL: Yay.

JK: —and we own it. So I think they would be happy about that. Because structure is important. I mean, yes, the church is a gathering, but a building is important, too—that we have a place to go to—a home, per se. It might be a little bit too large right now and it is expensive to maintain, but I think it does stand for something. It stands for endurance and faith. And I think about the German immigrants that built that church a hundred years ago, and I'm sure it was really hard to fundraise, but they wanted the home very badly. And I don't know if someone's told the story of how we were able to purchase that church.

AL: [*whispers*] Go ahead.

JK: A bank was going to—when the previous congregation—the original Lutheran congregation—was going to disband and actually move to a another congregation, a bank wanted to buy the property and tear it down and build housing. I think condos. But that church turned the bank down. I think they were offered like $1,000,000. And this was 20 years—more than 20 years ago—so that was quite a sum of money. They wanted it to go to another church. And even though we did not have $1,000,000—we had nowhere close to be able to match that—they—we came calling, and they said okay, so—that's how much the building meant to them. And of course, to preserve their legacy, you know, we want to take as good care of it as possible, too.

AL: Yeah. Yeah, no, we've done a little bit of research on that—

JK: –Oh yeah.

AL:--Lutheran church. Yeah. Just looking into who they were as well—-as the previous owners of the building that you're currently in at—

JK: Oh.

AL: —Christ Church.

JK: Yeah.

AL: So how has the congregation—because you've—the congregation has moved several times—

JK: Yes.

AL: —throughout its history—so how is it had to adapt to all these new places and how have these new places, these new environments influenced and impacted the church?

JK: Oh, I think—well, the church that I remember—the Lakeview location on Buckingham—it was a former temple—a synagogue. And I think there, a lot of people could walk to church or live close by in the city, so it was easy for them to get to—although parking was hard even back then [*laughter*] in the 60s in the Lakeview area. And as we've moved, I think it has caused a drop off in membership because we've always stayed in the city—well, actually, people like my family started to move out to the suburbs, and it became harder and harder. And this last move was really good because we had outgrown a rental space. At first, the rental space was just fine, but then actually more people started joining with children. We decided we really needed a church—our own church. So when we found the current location, we were ecstatic, and it was beautiful. However, parking. Parking has always been the problem, especially during the winter, you know, and the snow and everything. And that is just too—so unfortunate. And I heard that some people did not even want to have weddings at the church that they grew up in, because there's no place to park. I was like, "Oh!" That's kind of heartbreaking. Yeah. But when St. Mark's, I guess, was built originally, the German immigrants, I believe they all lived in the neighborhood, too. Right? So they just walked to church.

AL: Yeah, that's really sad that it's just parking that's prohibiting people.

JK: Yeah.

AL: So what do you think is unique about Christ Church as far as in Rogers Park? Like how do you compare to some of the other communities in the area?

JK: Well, I know we're surrounded by such a diversity of people. When I go to church and I--you know, coming from Park Ridge especially, and it's quite different—I notice that there's a lot more Middle Eastern people and people that I think are of the Muslim faith. And so that's very interesting. And I always wonder what they think. We're walking down the sidewalk. We're both like [*laughter*] looking at each other, staring at each other. I'll see a woman in a burqa walking down the street and she's probably, you know, looking at me and I'm looking at her. So it's—I think we're unique because we're—a lot of us now—the members are not from the neighborhood—we come from all parts of the city and suburbs. So that makes us different. You know, why we all come to this one spot when everybody else, you know, is just in the neighborhood. I think that's the most unique thing.

AL: Yeah. So these people who, you know, that do surround the community, they don't know—they're not a member of the congregation.

JK: Right.

AL: What is something that you would love for the community to know about your church and your congregation?

JK: Oh, that even though we're Christian, that we are not there to save souls and do conversions. I mean, there is evangelism, but there's many different kinds of evangelism, actually. And we want to do an evangelism where we tell people that we care about them and we're here to help them really. You know, and that's what churches do. We support communities in any way we can. That's the message I want to be clear, and I hope that the Rainbow banner in the front is kind of—gives them a hint that we're, you know, not very narrow-minded and Protestants of the media, evangelists or Protestants that people might, you know, who are not Christian might hear about. In fact, I know they think that actually. I know a lot of—I have non-Christian friends and they are completely turned off to church and Christian[s]. They think that I sit around reading the Bible and, you know, I would like to convert people to Christianity, and that is not our church at all. Nothing could be further [*laughs*] from the truth actually.

AL: No, that's a great message. So why did you say yes to this? What motivated you to participate in this—this oral history and the project as a whole?

JK: Well, I love history. I was a history major in college, and I was intrigued by religious history. And in that, it doesn't get talked about. Plus, I think—I love our church community and I think we need to toot our horn a little bit more to be better known. So I'm more than happy to help educate. I also, you know, like education. I wanted to be a teacher, too. And the only way you can educate people and change minds is you do have to speak up. So that's why I decided to participate and did so gladly. I was very excited about it, actually.

AL: That's wonderful. That's wonderful. So I wanted to ask you a kind of specific question that I had forgot to include when I sent you [the questions].

JK: Okay.

AL: I know when we were in the church sanctuary, there was this origami chain.

JK: Oh.

AL: And Elaine had said a really, I think, interesting and special story, and I was wondering if you knew it and if you could tell it. So that way we can record that story.

JK: The origami. Yeah. Hanging—

AL: —yeah.

JK: —I guess it was. That was sent by, I believe, a United Church of Christ in Dallas who had had it. And the meaning of the cranes is long life. It's a Japanese symbol.

And the original story is a young girl in Hiroshima who had—well, she died of radiation sickness—but when she was very ill, she made a thousand cranes. And in Japanese history, you have to reach a thousand for long life and good luck. And so she was trying to make a thousand crane train like that. So that's become a symbol. And there's some church in UCC in Dallas had heard about a tragedy that we suffered, and they had experienced a horrible situation where one of their community—it was an associate pastor or somebody like that—was murdered. And of course, everyone was heartbroken. They had received that hanging of cranes from someone else, and then they heard about Christ Church's tragedy, and they sent this hanging cranes to us. And what had happened is our beloved organist, Fran Walker—she had been our part-time organist for about fifteen years—and in October of 2022, she was murdered by her tenant. She had rented rooms out to various individuals, and one individual was very unstable and was frightening Fran's other tenants, [and] including Fran herself, so Fran had taken steps to have her formally evicted. And it was a—it's a very long process, you understand—but before the eviction could actually be finalized, she was murdered in a very brutal manner. And so it was crushing. It was—and to this day, I still can't wrap my head around her. I had spoken to her that Sunday before she was murdered. She had returned from an overseas summer vacation. And I just couldn't understand, you know, how this could happen. And it's something that the proverbial happens in other cities to other people. So that was a—and it has been—a big blow because, you know, we have never experienced such violence like that. And so it—I think it's changed the congregation. You cannot help but be changed when you lose someone in that manner. And in the case of Fran's death, it wasn't just her death; it was because it was, you know, an extreme, violent incident. And then so the other church heard about that [the crane chain] and knew that we needed it. And so it was brought to us, and it's hanging in our church. And so we'll hang on to it for a while as we continue to heal, but also keep our ears open for another church that may be experiencing loss and needs healing.

AL: Yeah.

JK: So that's our church now for the future is find another church to pass it to.

AL: Yeah. No, I think that's a really beautiful story, so that's why I wanted to hear it. So is there anything that you wanted to mention or talk about that we haven't covered yet?

JK: I don't think so. It's been very thorough. [*laughs*]

AL: Okay. Okay. Well, then, I am—I'm done. I have no more questions then. It was wonderful. I'm just going to take—record the room—the sound of the room. So just like 15 seconds of just silence.

[END OF SESSION]